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ABSTRACT

Based on years of experience with intergenerational correspondence at the "Senior Partners Network," this book is designed to help grandparents (and grandchildren) to find the right topics for correspondence, all laid out in clear steps. The book also offers sample letters, cards, and e-mail messages, and provides dozens of themes. The book's goal is to help grandparents connect with their grandchildren in a "warm and fun-loving manner"--through regular letter writing. Emphasizing that letter writing provides mutual benefits, the book notes that strong bonds through letters can help grandchildren succeed in school and can promote kindness and good citizenship. The book offers sample letters for diverse holidays; discusses building family relationships; storytelling; humor; and pets; and presents ways to use the four seasons for letters writing. It also considers school and learning and letters about school and presents "quick ideas for quick letters." (NKA)

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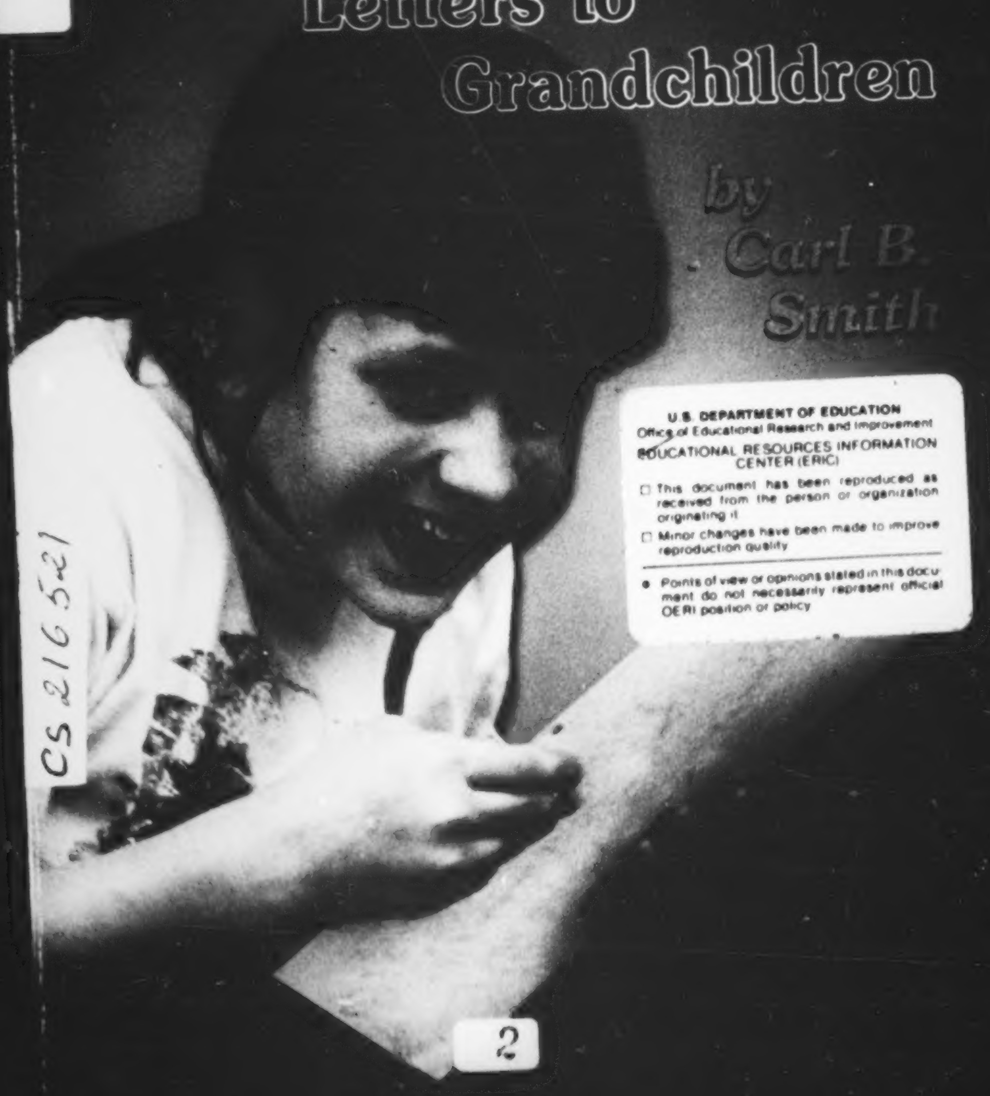
With Love, Grandma

Letters to Grandchildren

by
Carl B.
Smith

ED 423 551



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With Love, Grandma

Letters to Grandchildren

by Carl B. Smith

with Naomi Ritter

The Family Learning Association
&
ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication
Bloomington, Indiana

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Acknowlegments

The letters, drawings, and ideas in this book come from many children and adults from all across the country. Their contributions give authenticity to this work and will guide many readers, we are certain.

Over the years we have benefitted from the editors of THE WRITE PARTNER. Gina Brown, Joyce Mahan Cookman, Brigid Macek Rich, and Naomi Ritter have each brought their creativity and guidance to our senior pen pal newsletter. This book draws on their work and on their ideas.

Many of the drawings throughout the book may also prompt notes on topics that interest both you and your junior partner. Children often learn to articulate through visual aids, so it's helpful to exchange drawings and comments about them. I warmly thank Sara Steffey McQueen, art teacher in Bloomington, Indiana, for inspiring the creations you see here. We had the difficult task of choosing the most suitable drawings from the many excellent ones done by Ms. McQueen's students at Lakeview Elementary School. Thank you, boys and girls.

My own grandchildren write to me and I to them. In their own way, they prompted this book and inspire many of the letters in these pages. Here and there you will see their names: Aiko, Nicole, Charlie, Jacob, and Abbie. Their faces, of course, are embedded in my heart.

C.B.S.
Bloomington, Indiana

Introduction

A few years ago I started an organization, the Senior Partners Network, with a twofold aim. First, I wanted to provide a human resource for children needing a close relationship with a loving older person; secondly, I sought to enrich seniors' lives by linking them to these children through letters and electronic mail. With the help of the Family Literacy Center, I launched the **Senior Partners Network** (SPN) and its newsletter, *THE WRITE PARTNER*.

Since then many seniors have been sending notes, pictures, cards, and letters to young people all across America: both their own grandkids and unrelated junior partners. *THE WRITE PARTNER* newsletter highlights their activities, ideas, sample letters, and suggestions for children's books.

Meanwhile, I have been noticing that bookstores feature few books on the art of grandparenting itself, and almost nothing on writing letters to grandkids. So I realized that grandparents wanting a closer relationship with their grandchildren would benefit by the information, resources, and networking that *THE WRITE PARTNER* shares. The result is what you hold in your hands.

This book's goal is to help you connect with your grandkids in a warm and fun-loving manner—through regular letter-writing. Most grandparents try to stay in touch with their grandkids. But especially when they are very young and distant, talking on the phone is too momentary, too fragmentary to build the relationship. So how can grandparents remedy this lack? Write letters! Send quick notes! Use e-mail!

If this simple way of connecting to your grandchildren appeals to you, here are some more reasons. First of all, grandparents have the power to improve the lives of their grandkids. We have conquered the Great Depression and fought the wars that helped democracy spread across the globe. Our collective history gives us the idealism and toughness to help young people find a much-needed sense of direction. And we can do that through simple writing.

Secondly, think of the mutual benefits that letter-writing provides. Senior and junior writers share personal mail, which is always welcome. For a young child a letter is such a special gesture, a grown-up privilege. Do you remember how happy a piece of mail made you as a child? Children tend to save letters as a sign of their own importance. A letter means someone was thinking of them, someone took the time to send a message and expect a reply. Sharing words bonds people, as surely as sharing food does.

Another benefit is the influence that grandparents can subtly exert through letters. The influence of parents and teachers is not always welcome, is it? Their job is partly to tell kids what to do, what not to do.

One of the pure joys of grandparenting is freedom from the didactic role; you don't need to shape behavior in that direct way. You inhabit a special space beyond commands, beyond discipline. You can send those constant messages of unconditional love that every child needs to thrive.

To build a sense of one's own worth—of self-esteem—we all need those messages. What better way to send them than through regular letter-writing?

Of course grandparents can help a child develop character too. In fact letters can build conscience subtly, by exploring themes and issues that may inspire the child. Seasons and holiday activities offer an easy springboard to the deeper meaning of important cultural practices and how they relate to the child. Halloween can serve as an object lesson. By contrasting the ghost, vampire or robot to their own personalities, grandparents can help grandkids realize the strength they have within.

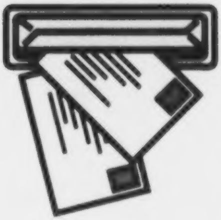
You can thereby encourage them to build the knowledge and the character traits that will make them strong individuals. Being ourselves means recognizing and developing our own strengths, so we can rely on ourselves when life inevitably challenges us. So your Halloween message might be: "Enjoy your costume character, then step back into your shoes as a stronger person."

Since children of all ages may be exposed to troubling problems—homelessness, drug addiction, violence, and death—a frank but simple exchange of views may help a junior deal with such trauma. Asking the junior what he/she would do in a difficult situation encourages the habit of self-examination that people of conscience must develop.

For teenagers, news items may prompt an exchange about moral dilemmas. For example, those exposed to drug pushers of their own age must learn how to resist the overwhelming peer pressure to conform. Working through the pros and cons of asserting one's individuality may empower your grandchildren to find their own solutions to a range of personal problems.

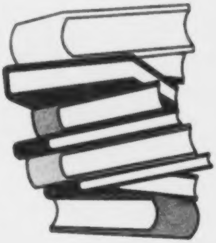
by Jenny Johnson, 6th grade

Another satisfying goal of the writing partnership is to show the value of learning, of education and the many gifts it brings. Grandparents need not preach in reminding juniors that reading, careful observation, problem-solving and knowing where to find information are skills for a lifetime. Inquiries about school activities or interests the child is developing may reinforce positive attitudes toward all kinds of learning.



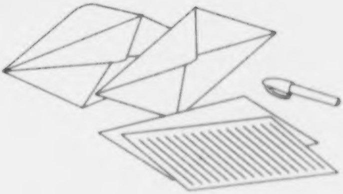
As you will see from the first chapter, books and literacy are a primary concern for the **Senior Partners Network**. It's hard to read and write letters if you can't read and write. So throughout this book, you will find each theme described, followed by sample letters on that subject.

Then come suggestions on where you and your junior partner can "Read all about it!" Encouraging reading is the single most effective way to develop a young person's intelligence. When you read a book together, it lets you share interesting ideas that are immediately relevant to your grandchild.



Those of us in the **Senior Partners Network** hope that you will stay in touch with your grandkids. Our experience and suggestions may help lead you to a deeper, more satisfying relationship with your grandchildren. It is *your* wisdom that will pass on to a younger generation that needs the guidance you can provide. That guidance can and does make a difference to *all of us*. Happy writing!

Writing Letters to Kids



First of all, you don't need any special writing skills to become a good letter-writer. The most effective letters are brief, simple, and—most importantly—in your own voice. Sample notes in this chapter may help get you started. But after surveying the possibilities, you should find and develop your own tone, suited to your personality, life, and relationship to the child. The main point of writing is to remind juniors that you are thinking of them, you are interested in their learning, and you want to help however you can.

To start, write regularly: once a month. As your exchange develops it may become more frequent. For catching and keeping a child's attention, keep your letters brief. Remember that brief notes, if sent regularly, will convince children you care about their learning and their success.

Make sure to include a legible copy of your address. If you are using e-mail, your messages include your e-mail address, but you should type it into your first messages, so your young person has a hard copy, in case of a computer glitch.

Getting to the post office for stamps may also slow your partner's responses, so why not include a book of stamps in your introductory letter? This gift relays the message that you are serious about keeping in touch, and gives the child a very real sense of independence. Parents will also appreciate your thoughtfulness.

THE IMPORTANT INFLUENCE OF GRANDPARENTS

by Bob Keeshan
a.k.a. Captain Kangaroo

What our nation will be in the future depends very much on how we in adult society treat our young people. When "Captain Kangaroo" first entered homes on October 3, 1955, it was no accident that the 28-year-old actor who portrayed the Captain resorted to the magic of makeup to add 30 years to his actual age, and became a television grandfather to the first of several generations of American children. I was that young, 28-year-old actor, and now, in the 28th year of broadcast for the Captain, the extensive makeup is not quite so necessary. I have, quite literally, grown into the part.

In designing the program those many years ago, I wanted to communicate to young Americans the positive values of American life, to relay to them, to model for them, the kindness and gentleness which make it possible for us, as humans, to share a life in this world. I wanted to excite them about their future, to make them know that great accomplishment was within their reach, to cause young people to feel of value, to know love.

To pass on such values I needed a vehicle, a conduit, and I had always been impressed by the warmth possible in the relationship between a grandparent and child. Gray was added to my then brown hair, and consequently warmth was added to my character. It worked, and worked well. The intergenerational relationship, Captain to young person, was a valued relationship then, and is valued today by the children of those first children in the Captain's audience.

The role of a grandparent in a child's development is far from static. As society changes to accommodate new ideas and attitudes, so does grandparenting. What happens in our society to change the values inherent in the grandparent relationship? Some of the changes result from the way parents treat children. They are often too busy with work to give their kids the one thing they require of adults: their time. Thus even loving parents may ignore children in their time of greatest need and growth. Then, at a later stage of their development, those children may be unwilling or unable to communicate.

Seniors offer rich potential for nurturing and positively influencing our young. If youngsters need to share time their parents lack, a grandparent can give that time. Seniors usually have leisure, strong values, and unconditional love to give young people. Their own reward lies in the joys of this special connection. The intergenerational relationship is natural; if we fail to foster it, "what fools we mortals be." The two generations—old and young—are in great need of each other.

BEST GRANDMA ON EARTH

Source: *"Old and Young: Generations at the Crossroads." Testimony before the House of Representatives, Select Committee on Aging; Wednesday, Sept. 8, 1982.*

SENDING THE FIRST LETTER

Now let's get started! Here are some useful guidelines:

1. Be yourself, but remember the age of your pen pal. See the child development chart on page 19.

2. Write simply and briefly, at least until you know about your junior partner's interests. The younger the child, the shorter your letters should be.

3. Enjoy yourself. Tell jokes or personal stories.

4. Encourage learning subtly. Praise curiosity. Show your own curiosity about the child's world. Show that you want to learn things together.

5. Include pictures, news articles, information, even books. Respond to the questions your grandchild poses. The sooner you get an answer back, the more effective you will be.

6. Be upbeat and positive, compliment the child whenever possible.

Examples

Children's ages naturally govern their view of the world, as does their experience. These sample letters try to reflect their evolving experience, encouraging children to write responses that match their maturity. All these letters cover several important themes you can express repeatedly:

1. **Care**: *I care about you and your success.*

2. **Encouragement**: *Keep working now because it will pay off in school and later in life.*

3. **Challenge**: *Can you learn something new? Will you change your behavior to become better?*

4. **Look to the future**: *The future can be the fulfillment of your dreams.*

5. Remember **the KISS principle** when writing to children, that is, Keep It Simple!

INTRODUCTORY LETTERS

Ages 3-5

Snapshots of you and friends, your pets, your house or surroundings make your life vivid for distant children. You may encourage an exchange of pictures by asking them to send their drawings of things they like.

> **Dear Penny,**
>
> **Here is our darling cat Irma, watching birds outside my bedroom window. Sometimes she makes funny squeaking noises when she spots a robin. Do you think she's trying to attract the bird inside? Please send me a drawing of your puppy Dagwood!**

Cut out a cartoon from a newspaper and mail it with a simple note.

> **Dear Tim,**
>
> **Isn't this funny? I laugh at it because I sometimes act just as dumb as this guy did. Why don't you send me a cartoon that makes you laugh, and tell me why?**

This simple message tells your grandchild not only that you want to share enjoyable moments with him/her; it also says that reading a newspaper can be fun.

For young readers, picture postcards offer an automatic topic. With a picture of your local library, you might write:

> **Dear Alice,**
>
> **Here's where I love to read a magazine or book. Can you send me a picture of your library? I'd love to know what you find there.**

With this message you share both interesting parts of your community life and an enthusiasm for reading.

Ages 6-8

Theme: The First Letter
Messages: Let's learn about each other through pictures. What interests are you developing? Challenge: write often.

> **Dear Karen,**
>
> **I'm so happy we're going to write to each other! We will learn a lot together in the months ahead. So you can learn more about who your Gramma really is, I am sending you a brand new picture. What can you learn from it?**
>
> **Why don't you send me a picture, too? I want to know you better. I like (swimming, sailing, fixing cars, etc.). What do you like to do?**

Theme: Let's Share Learning

Subtle messages: Reading is learning; I read a lot; you can learn through reading.

Dear Danny,

Every time I read a book I learn something helpful. You go to school to learn ideas that will help you. Let's share what we are learning.

I'm reading about sailboats so I can learn to sail better. Did you know that sailboats have a board in the middle that sticks down into the water? That board keeps the wind from pushing the boat sideways.

Please tell me about something that you are learning in school.

Ages 9-12

Theme: Learn from traveling

Message: Reading schedules is the first step. How can we use them?

Dear Ben,

At the airport recently I picked up this flight schedule. I wondered how many planes fly to your city each day.

If you could take a trip, where would you like to go? Does the flight schedule show you how you could get to your desired city?

Maybe we could plan a trip together for the summer. Let me know what places interest you.

Ages 13-16

Theme: Learn through Reading

Subtle Messages: We learn all the time; books teach us; are you learning through reading?

Dear Susan,

I've been reading about sailing because I think sailboats are beautiful. It amazes me, too, that a sailboat can go anywhere, no matter which way the wind is blowing. If I learn to use the sails and the winds together, I can sail anywhere, even into the face of the wind—or at least close to it. A sail works much like the wing on an airplane does. As the wind flows across it, pressure on one side pushes or lifts the wing or the sail. And away we go!

Whenever I start a new hobby, I learn about it by reading or by asking someone to be my teacher. Are you reading about something that interests you? Why don't you write me about it?

RESPONDING TO ERRORS

What if your partner sends you letters full of errors like misspellings ? How do you respond positively to poorly written letters? First of all, remember your purpose in writing is to express love, friendship, and encouragement. You don't want to give the impression that writing letters is a test of skills.

Secondly, you want to praise your grandchildren for sharing ideas, not scold them for errors. The best way for you to help is to respond with the correct spelling of the words they misspelled. In other words, be a good model.

Letters From Ages 6-8

Dear Gramma,

I am in secun grad. I lik to lern math. I lik to wch tv. Hr is a pikcher I drew. In the piksher I am in my hous.

lov, Emily

Dear Emily,

Thanks so much for your letter. I liked reading it. I'm very glad you like learning math. I'll bet you are good at it too. What math are you learning in the second grade?

Your picture is fine. I put it up on the wall, so I can see what you and your house look like. Here is my picture of me and our cat Henry on the front porch.

Please write back soon. I love your letters!

Letters From Ages 9-12

Dear Gramps,

I am sending you a pichur of myself. My moms boyfrend took the picure. They broke up. I dont have a favrit subgect in scool. It is borin I like to play Nintendo. Im good at it. My uncle Bob works in a factory like you used to.

love, Jason

Dear Jason,

Thanks for your letter, and for the picture of yourself. You look like you would be a very good baseball player.

Do you like to play baseball? I like to watch the Cubs games on TV. My favorite player is Ryne Sanburg. What team do you like best? Do you have a favorite player?

Your cousin Kevin also likes to play Nintendo. Please write and tell me about the games you are best at playing. Do you ever read Nintendo magazines? Kevin goes to the library to read them. He says that way he doesn't have to spend all of his allowance on them.

Please write soon. Your letters are great fun!

Letters From Ages 13-16

Dear Granny,

I wanna to go to college and be a lawyer when I grow up. My mom says I wood be good at it because I like to argue. My sister and I always argue. If I cant go to law college, then I want to become a cosmetician like aunt Joan

I like to dress nice and look nice. Not too dressy but not too messy either. I also like to hang out with my friends. Thats the best thing about school.

The second best thing about school is english. I like my english teacher, hes cool.

Thanks for writing.

love, Janine

Dear Janine,

Thanks for telling me about your plans for the future. I think it's crucial to develop a skill and to do your job well, whatever it is. My father used to say that the only thing you can never lose is what you know. Wow, was he ever right!

I'm sure you would be a good lawyer or a good cosmetician. You will need to go to school for both professions.

Tell me more about your English class. What do you like the most about the class?

I miss and love you!

HOW KIDS CHANGE AS THEY LEARN AND GROW

Every young person reaches milestones at different ages, but here are some general rules to keep in mind when writing.

In the early years (ages three to five) children love fantasy and fairy tales more than they enjoy reading about how soccer is played. At this age they enjoy using language and delight in chanting predictable phrases and rhymes.

No one ever gives up the pleasure of fantasy, but at six and seven, kids begin to sort out the differences between fantasy and reality. They begin to understand the importance of their families and of significant people in their lives. Books about sleeping outside, pets, and friends interest kids of this age, especially if they can read by themselves. In their eighth and ninth years, children become more interested in using books and writing for information about real people and events.

By the time children reach the age of ten or eleven, they have a better understanding of historical time, and can project themselves into times and places that were real. They enjoy learning about people who lived in the past under conditions different from their own. That's why biographies and historical fiction are popular with these kids.

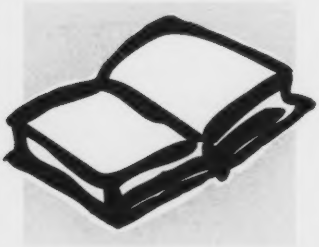
Between twelve and fourteen, most kids tumble and scream their way into puberty. They become interested in the opposite sex and are generally very involved with and influenced by their peers. Their critical thinking skills also may take a major leap: they are now able to develop principles for judging people and situations.

Keep the chart on the next page for an easy reference to these changes. Knowing development patterns will help you write more effectively to your young pen pal.

HOW CHILDREN DEVELOP

	Characteristics	Interests	Skills
Ages 3-5	Accept what is in books and on TV as real.	Enjoy magic and fantasy characters; like using language and word play.	Read pictures to help tell stories; easily memorize rhymes and predictable phrases.
Ages 6-7	Beginning to sort out fantasy and reality	Enjoy stories about people and situations that they can relate to.	Able to figure out the "code", so print carries meaning; memorize patterns and rely heavily on previous experience with a book.
Ages 8-9	Understand the difference between fantasy and reality.	Interested in facts and information about real people and events.	Know how to read, but lack the stamina needed for long novels; need the support of pictures and familiar vocabulary.
Ages 10-11	Understand *time* and incidents in terms of *then* and *now*.	Enjoy learning about real people and events that took place long ago.	Able to sequence events and mentally organize information so that it makes sense; able to project self into real time and places.
Ages 12-14	Relationships are important; developing principles by which to judge others.	Enjoy characters that share their own problems, concerns, and feelings.	Able to "feel" and empathize with others who are "going through the same things." Reading takes on a deeper meaning.
Ages 15-16	Becoming self-assertive, yet rely heavily on peer-group support.	Interested in exploring alternative life roles and values.	Can think about "what might be" or what is possible. Reading about abstract ideas leads to idealism for this age group.

BOOK SHARING



Barbara Putrich and her teenage daughter have come closer together by doing one simple thing: they read the same book and talk about it. Jerry Nugent and his son did the same thing. "I have seen wonderful changes," says Nugent, "in our family and in the others sharing books with their children."

A recent study shows that adults can discuss all kinds of events with kids without the preachy tone so often associated with such conversations. The participants focused on a book they were reading, nothing more. Now why would that make such a difference?

The action in a book stands outside the adult-child relationship. Parent or grandparent and child can thus talk about fun things or bothersome events without a threat to their personal relationship. If each person gives the other the courtesy and freedom to react to the story events, they will express their feelings, ideas, and convictions without any direct implications about themselves. For example, a young child can sympathize with the fears of a fictional child without fearing ridicule for being a baby—as might happen to the reader in his/her own family.

An adult can predict ugly consequences for a story character who skips school. Yet that same prediction about your grandchild would probably offend the child. With a story character, the adult can express values as an observer. He/she makes no prediction or judgment about

the behavior. Whatever the grandparent says reflects the actions of a story character. The grandchild absorbs the point, however, without feeling attacked.

Book conversations between child and adult reveal they have thoughts and feelings, joys and sorrows that the other may not perceive otherwise. They begin to develop a respect for each other, even if they disagree.

Since time slips easily through our fingers, many people claim they don't have time to read and discuss books with children. Probably they believe that book-sharing requires lengthy exchanges. Quite the contrary. I recommend short books and short messages about them; make your book exchanges brief and fun.

As a letter writer, you can also use book-sharing as a way of holding valuable written conversations. Why not ask your grandchild about reading a book together, and then sharing your thoughts about it as you progress? You may want to send him/her an inexpensive book as a way of starting your book conversations. If you do, select something that is age-appropriate and fits the child's interests.

Book sharing often produces great benefits for the adult and the child who try it. Mutual communication is a starter. Then there is the high probability that you will find books you both enjoy. Who knows? You may rediscover the wonderful world of children's books.

Finding Interests

Here is a list of questions about children's interests from *CONNECT! How To Get Your Kids To Talk To You,* a book published by the Family Literacy Center. You can copy and send this list to your grandchildren, or use it to help choose a book for you and your pen pal to read and discuss.

Taking an inventory of both the child's and your own current passions is a good way to guide (without dominating) the choice of reading material. Making a list of your likes and dislikes enables you and your grandchild to set some limits on what each of you is and is not willing to read.

INVENTORY OF INTERESTS

1. What do you like to do most?

2. What is your favorite thing to do with your family?

3. What are your favorite animals?

4. What things do you like to collect?

5. Which books are your current favorites?

   Magazines or newspapers?

   Comic books or comic strips?

6. Circle the kinds of books you like most.

   fairy tales
   romances
   poetry
   science fiction
   sports novels
   picture books
   adventure
   jokes/riddles
   detective stories
   how-to books
   books about growing up
   autobiography and biography

7. Who is your favorite character to read about?

8. What do you like about that character?

9. Which TV shows or movies do you enjoy watching?

10. What are those shows about?

READING AND SHARING LETTERS

In letters to your grandchild, why not mention something you have read recently, expressing your feelings about the ideas, events, or characters in that book or article? Then encourage your pen pal to send back his/her feelings about a book. In your own way you can promote reading books as a source of ideas and a way of communicating with other members of the family. The people who interest both you and your grandchild are probably compelling personalities partly because of the reading they do. Why not say so in your letters?

Ages 3-5

> Dear Natasha,
>
> I just saw an ABC book called THE ANIMAL ALPHABET BOOK. Each letter looked like some animal. "A" was an alligator, "B" was a butterfly, "C" was a cat. It made me laugh to see all the animals twisted into the shapes of letters.
>
> Have you read any books lately? Will you tell me about the book, or send pictures?

Ages 6-8

Dear Drew,

Do you tell others about the books you read? I get all kinds of good ideas from books. Did you know that some birds live in big cactuses in the desert? I have wondered how I would live if I got lost in the desert.

Please tell me about a book you are reading. I'm sure you are learning some interesting things.

Ages 9-12

Dear Daniel,

When I was your age, there were no computers. Most information was available only in a book. I just read THE CLIENT, by John Grisham, the story of a boy who saw a crooked lawyer commit suicide. Before he died, he told the boy where the body of a well-known politician was buried and who murdered him. Both the mob and the police chase the boy to try to get the information from him. A woman lawyer uses all kinds of legal tricks to protect the boy, her "client."

I learned some new twists to an individual's legal rights through this book. Have you read anything interesting lately?

Ages 13-16

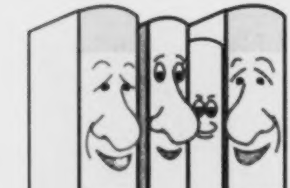
Dear Daryl,

I was just reading a story that made me think of you. In it two brothers don't get along well. One is handsome and athletic; the other lacks strength and looks like any ordinary guy. You can see why there might be tension between these two brothers.

As I read this story, "Chinese Handcuffs," I was hoping you and your brother weren't having the same kinds of problems. That's one of the advantages I find in reading books: they help me think about my life and the people around me. I hope I make better decisions as a result of thinking about the characters in a book.

Have you read anything lately that stirred you up?

SELECTING A BOOK FOR YOUR GRANDCHILD



Many people can name a book that has greatly influenced their lives. They often refer to the Bible or some other religious book, or to a novel that has convinced them to pursue an adventure that they previously lacked the courage to undertake. Reading a book may hold a personal meaning; but the major reason parents and grandparents encourage reading lies in its power to develop a successful person.

Through reading we gain joy, knowledge, and career success. Being fluent readers and knowing how to find and use information sets us apart from those who have not achieved those skills. That advantage is becoming more evident every day. Readers have a stronger sense of personal worth than non-readers. They are also more likely to enjoy the good things in life than those who can't or won't read. And the habit of reading gives a permanent inner resource. For those reasons alone, we should do whatever we can to promote reading among our children.

Follow these brief guidelines in selecting books for your grandchildren:

1. Surround them with Books

Send them books from the library, from the bookstore, from grandma's attic. Keep the books coming.

2. Converse about Books

Encourage parents or older peers to read aloud to children, no matter their age. Then talk about the story—but make it a conversation, not a test. Write to your grandchild about the books you read, and ask what s/he finds interesting about them.

3. Select appealing Books

Children's interests change naturally as they grow and develop curiosity: from picture books for young children to neighborhood adventures in the early grades, to personal friendships in the pre-teen years.

4. Give short, easy Books

Don't overwhelm a child with difficult reading. Until you are sure the child wants more challenging material, give books that are quick, fun, and easy to read. That doesn't mean you shouldn't give reference books as gifts, but don't give difficult books when you want the child to read for pleasure.

5. Expand horizons

Use book buying as an opportunity to expand your grandchild's views. Remember, books offer our quickest, most powerful vehicle for new experience. Information, humor, fantasy, adventure, problem-solving: all can pop out of a book.

6. Ask your grandchild

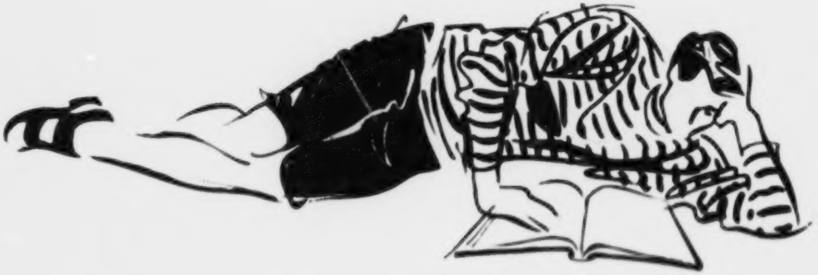
Finally, but most importantly, ask for suggestions. What does s/he want and need?

Book Sharing Opens Communication

Thousands of grandparents across the country have discovered a great way to open up communication with their grandchildren by reading and sharing books. You can do the same with your grandchild. Have him/her select a book you both can read. As you read, write to each other about the book. Do you both like it? How do you feel about the characters? What do you think will happen next? Does the book have any special meaning for you? Place as much value on the child's feelings and opinions as you do on your own.

Have you ever noticed how much people have to tell each other when they discover they have read and liked the same book or seen the same film? Their conversation seems energized by the common experience of a story they have shared. You and your young pen pal might enjoy sharing your ideas about one of the following books, which all deal with writing. Grandparents can send a copy of the book to their grandkids, or ask them if they know how to find the book in the public library. What a great way to begin your new letter connection! Of course you can find many more books on all topics suitable for kids at the library and on the World Wide Web.

If you and your grandchild have enjoyed sharing a book, please write or call, and we will include it in our Senior Partners newsletter. Our address and phone number are at the end of the book.



BOOKS TO SHARE

For Ages 3-5

***DEAR BEAR*, by Joanna Harrison** (Lerner Books, 1994) $6.95. Katie is afraid of the bear that lives under the stairs in her house, until they exchange letters and she finally gets to meet him.

***ARTHUR'S PEN PAL*, by Lillian Hoban** (Harper Collins, 1982) $3.50. (Also Harper Audio, 1990) $6.95. When Arthur receives a photograph from his pen pal Sandy, he changes his ideas about big brothers and little sisters.

For Ages 6-8

***EVERY MONDAY IN THE MAILBOX*, by Louisa Fox** (Eerdmans Publishing, 1995) $15.00. Melinda looks forward to the letters she receives from her favorite neighbor, who has moved into a nursing home. When the elderly woman dies, it takes time for Melinda to find a way to stop missing her.

***CLEVER LETTERS*, by Laura Allen** (Pleasant Co., 1997) $9.95. Have fun with the way you write! This entertaining guide shows how to create pretzel letters, smoosh-cards, invisible messages and more.

For Ages 9-12

***DEAR MR. HENSHAW*, by Beverly Cleary** (William Morrow, 1997) $5.95. In his letters to his favorite author, ten-year-old Leigh reveals his problems in coping with his parents' divorce, being the new boy in school, and generally finding his own place in the world.

For Ages 13-16

***BEETHOVEN LIVES UPSTAIRS*, By Barbara Nichol** (Orchard Books, 1994) $15.95. Letters that Christoph and his uncle exchange show how Christoph's feelings for Mr. Beethoven, the eccentric boarder in his home, change from anger and embarrassment to compassion and admiration.

by Heather Matlock, 4th grade

Holiday Letters

CHRISTMAS

GIVING GIFTS OF TIME AND SELF

The older we get, the more we realize how precious time is. Not that we have to measure out the minutes like dollops of gold, yet we often speak of "wasting time" as if we had frittered away a commodity. Rather, we begin to realize that we define ourselves by the way we spend our time.

Holidays often prompt people to write letters. Perhaps that's because of fond memories we have about our celebrations. At holidays relatives gather, good food brings pleasure, and we retell stories. Because we remember all these good things, we want to write to those people who shared those experiences, or tell a friend why this particular holiday matters to us. By all means, use these occasions to connect meaningfully with your grandchild. Recounting past holiday activities will help define your past and make it interesting to the child.

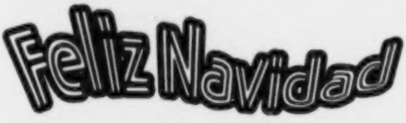
In the season of holiday gifts, the season when we give symbols of friendship, family, and love, we naturally think of our priorities and the ways we spend our energies. Typically, New Year's Day reminds us to order our priorities as we resolve to become better people. This season opens our minds to self-examination. How do we want to spend our energies in the months ahead?

If we are employed, of course we must make a major commitment to the job that pays our bills. But what other priorities do we hold? Are we willing to give time to what we believe is important? As we think of the broad areas where we want to improve ourselves, where do we want to put our energies over the next few months? This chart may help us to visualize where and how much energy we are willing to spend.

I can't list all the possibilities here, but this gives us a start. Each of us can expand on the categories as we think about our own beliefs and priorities. Naturally, we have included writing to kids as a priority for all of us. By thinking through our priorities, we can list the concrete things we will do to carry out our beliefs, and we can assign the time and energy those activities will take.

Personal Growth Categories	**Importance to me (Rate from 1 to 5)**	**Activities for the next 3 months**
Health and exercise		
Spiritual life		
Family togetherness		
People in need		
Knowledge/Skills		
Writing to children		

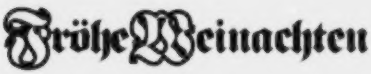
CELEBRATING WINTER HOLIDAYS



As our American population becomes increasingly diverse, we gain awareness of the different holidays celebrated around the country. In the past decade, many Asians and Middle Eastern people have settled in the United States. They bring with them their own rich holiday traditions and holy days, which confirm their sense of identity.

Joyeux Noël

We can use the traditional Christmas and New Year's season to stimulate us to seek information about cultural or ethnic holidays new to us. Whether the holiday has roots in Asia, one of our Native American nations, or another religion practiced in our neighborhood, we have much to learn about the holidays of the citizens around us.



Send a letter to your grandchild describing your own investigation into a holiday, then challenge him/her to find out about a cultural holiday or holy day and inform you about it by mail. You may suggest ways your young pen pal can locate information: an encyclopedia, library books, talking with people who celebrate the holiday, television documentaries, and so on.

A Sample List of Holidays

By describing a holiday from another culture, you can combine education with holiday activities. Here are descriptions of a few holidays commonly celebrated in the United States.

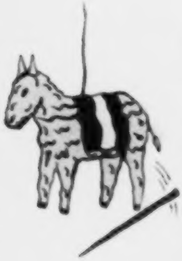
Noviy Gode: Russian New Year

For several generations, the biggest cultural celebration in Russia has been the beginning of the New Year. In preparation for the holiday, people decorate evergreen trees with lights and ornaments. They build sculptures and ice houses.

The holiday begins with parties at offices and workplaces on the afternoon of December 31. That evening, everyone watches television to hear the speech of the President, who wishes a good life to all in the New Year. Many families give parties for their friends and relatives. They eat special foods such as goose, turkey, and holiday cakes.

The folk figures Ded Moroz (Grandfather Frost) and his granddaughter Snegourochka (the Snow Maiden) bring bags of gifts to put under the tree for the little children.

Navidad: Christmas in Mexico



People in Mexico also celebrate the Christmas season, Navidad. Families begin the holiday by setting up nativity scenes in their homes. Another way Mexicans honor the birth of Jesus is with neighborhood visits called *posadas*. Every night from December 16 to 24, groups of people dressed as Mary and Joseph go from house to house asking for a place to stay. Finally one family lets them in, and everyone has a fiesta.

At the parties children break open the *piñata*, a papier-maché container shaped like an animal and filled with candy and toys. The *piñata* hangs from the ceiling, and the children cover their eyes, taking turns to try breaking it with a stick. After it opens everyone rushes to collect the candy. Special foods for the Christmas fiestas include *tamales*, made of cornmeal wrapped in corn husks; *buñuelos*, deep-fried pancakes;

roast turkey; and *atole*, a drink that is made from cornmeal and cinnamon.

At midnight on Christmas Eve, whole families go to church for a special service, the *Misa del Gallo*, to welcome the birth of Jesus. Christmas Day is quiet, but the season does not end until January 6, the Day of the Three Kings (*El Dia de los Reyes*). Children put out empty shoes the night before, and in the morning they find the shoes filled with presents.

Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is the Swahili word for "First Fruits." In 1966 Maulana Karenga, a professor of Black Studies at California State University, created this non-religious celebration of family and social values. By the early 1990s Kwanzaa had more than 5 million participants worldwide.

Each day of Kwanzaa, from December 26 to January 1, celebrates one of seven principles: unity (*omoja*), self-determination (*kujichagulia*), collective responsibility (*ujima*), cooperative economics (*ujamaa*), purpose (*nia*), creativity (*kuumba*), and faith (*imani*). Each evening family members gather to light a candle on the *kinara*, a seven-branched candelabra, and discuss the principle of that day; often they exchange gifts. On December 31 the family joins others in the community for a feast called *karamu*.

Other winter holidays celebrated around the world provide an interesting research project for you and your grandchild. Here are a few suggestions:

Tet Nguyen-Dan: Lunar New Year celebrated in China

Leddat: Orthodox Christmas celebrated in Eritrea

(**Sources**: *INTERNATIONAL HOLIDAYS AND OBSERVANCES*, by Martha L. Berg, 1992; *ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITTANICA* online.)

CHRISTMAS SEASON LETTERS

Ages 3-5

Dear Carla,

Are you enjoying the holiday season? It is fun to see family and friends. I wish I could be there. Whom do you like to spend your time with? Be sure to tell that person how much he or she means to you.

Will you please send me a drawing of that person?

Ages 6-8

Dear Justin,

In December it turns cold here. We usually have some snow before Christmas. How is your weather? Are you doing some special things for Christmas?

Will you try to make someone happy by the way you act? I would really like to hear about some nice thing that you did for one of your friends or someone in the family.

I'm enclosing an envelope, so you can mail me a letter right away.

Ages 9-12

Dear Joni,

Have you noticed all the holiday decorations in the stores now? Have you decorated your house or classroom? What holiday activities do you have in school?

When I was in school we decorated our classroom with snowflakes. We folded paper and then cut different shapes from it. When you unfold the paper, it looks like a snowflake.

Will you make me a snowflake, so I can decorate my house?

Ages 13-16

Dear Josh,

In high school I had a friend from Mexico. She celebrated *La Virgen de Guadalupe,* which means Our Lady of Guadalupe. She told me about all the different activities that she participated in to celebrate this holiday.

Do you have friends with different cultural backgrounds? Have you ever visited them during one of their holiday celebrations? Please write me about your friends' culture.

HOLIDAY READING AND VIEWING

You can send these books and videos to your grandchild, then exchange reactions to them in letters. Encourage the parents to watch the video with the child, so you can all share the conversation about them.

For Ages 3 and up

***HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS*, by Dr. Seuss** (Random House, 1997) $2.75. The Whos in Whoville love Christmas, but the Grinch doesn't. He tries to foil their festivities by stealing the trees, gifts, trimmings, food, and tinsel. The Whos show the Grinch that their celebration doesn't come from a store.

***DR. SEUSS' HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS*, The video** (Warner Brothers Home Video) $12.95. Boris Karloff, Chuck Jones, and Dr. Seuss himself bring this animated tale to life. A special feature is the Seuss song "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch."

***JINGLE BUGS*, by David Carter** (Simon and Schuster, 1992) $15. Jingle bugs, Jingle bugs/Jingle all the way/Here's a merry pop-up tale/ To gladden Christmas Day. (Yes, there really is a Santa bug!)

***THE SNOWMAN STORYBOOK*, by Raymond Briggs** (Random House, 1997) $3.25. Delightful fantasies all about the lives of snowmen.

***THE POLAR EXPRESS*, by Chris van Allsberg** (Houghton Mifflin, 1985) $18.95. A magical Christmas Eve train ride to the North Pole, this book won the Caldecott Award. Book and audiotape, $24.95. The CD-ROM edition is narrated by Garrison Keillor, and has original music and state-of-the-art animation.

For Ages 6-8

***WE CELEBRATE HANNUKAH,* by Bobbie Kalman** (Crabtree Publishing, 1986) $8.95. Explains the traditions of the Jewish Festival of Lights. Presents songs, poems, stories, recipes, games, activities, and celebration ideas.

***THE GOLDEN CHRISTMAS TREE,* by Carole Gerber** (Willowisp Press, 1994) $3.50. This beautifully illustrated book tells the story of a family of spiders and how they gave a golden Christmas tree to a family of people.

For Ages 9-12

***THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER,* by Barbara Robinson** (Harper Collins, 1988) $3.95. According to *THE DENVER POST*, "outrageous, lively, funny, and wonderful. The Christmas story takes on a strangely moving depth of meaning and shines through with a new brilliance."

A RUGRATS CHANUKAH. Paramount/Nickelodeon Video. $12.95. Those popular Rugrats star in this tale full of history, laughs and adventure. As the actors play out the Maccabees' Biblical struggle against King Antiochus, the Rugrats become involved in a mysterious struggle of their own. Education and fun for the whole family.

For Ages 13-16

***A CHRISTMAS CAROL,* by Charles Dickens** (Pocket Books, 1997) $3.99. One of the most popular Christmas stories, perhaps the many stage and screen versions may make you and your youngster curious to read the original tale.

***THE GIFT OF THE MAGI,* by O. Henry** (Random House, 1996) $1.99. A classic tale of total generosity that expresses selfless love. Sharing it with children helps them find personal meaning in the holiday.

THANKSGIVING

IN SEARCH OF SUSTENANCE

Thanksgiving may be the friendliest of all American holidays. It brings families together over food to give thanks and to celebrate the family's sense of community. Overall, a Thanksgiving gathering of family members reassures individuals, especially children. They see old and young join in a common gesture of friendship and support. These family meals seem to represent a cyclical stability, a gentle affirmation that there are anchors in life.

Is it important for children to feel that their family is secure, that it will survive to support them? A recent study by researchers at the University of Miami and Florida International University asked elementary school children what worried them most. More than fifty percent of the children said their most frequent worry was about their family and its survival. The intensity of children's fears about their family exceeded the intensity of their worries about other social topics —appearance, future events, friends, and health. In fact, their concern for the stability of their family, for the threat of divorce and related fears, was as intense as was their worry about disaster and physical harm. (Silverman et. al., 1995)

Nurturing Family

Almost by definition, the family nurtures young children. Because human children mature more slowly than animals, the human family spends a much longer period caring for its young than animals do. Some might say the family cares for its own from birth to death. That sense of support provides reassurance among the family members. Family holidays, such as Thanksgiving, ease the worries that children have about the future of their family, for then they see children, parents, grandparents and other relatives forming a mature support mechanism across generations.

Children do have other means of nurturing, of course. Friends, school, and pen pals can encourage them, can express love, and can give them direction. Though these other sources do not have the same power as a healthy family, they act as pillars of strength, especially for children of divorced parents or those who have deep-seated worries about the stability of their families.

Civilizing Effects

Besides nurturing, the family civilizes its members. It teaches them to respect the rights of others, to treat people according to custom, and to develop a morality about property, human life, personal responsibility, and relationships. This civilizing effect comes through love, example, rules of conduct, and, oh yes, through rewards and punishment.

Without a doubt, the family nurtures and civilizes by a guiding hand, and often by a sense of tradition within the family. How often, for instance, do parents cajole their children with a comment like: "Speak politely. I don't want to be embarrassed in front of your grandparents." Implied in that parental caution: "In this family, we expect our members to respect others through mannerly behavior."

Their complaints to the contrary, children internalize the value of family rules and use them as center posts, from which they can evaluate their own behavior.

Grandparent Support

A grandparent cannot know the conditions and rules in a grandchild's immediate family, but they can still serve the functions of nurturing and civilizing. By encouraging grandchildren to succeed in learning and to treat others as a responsible citizen, grandparents become a source of strength. The role of grandparents in nurturing and civilizing a young person becomes especially valuable if the child's world and family do not serve those purposes well.

Use this special holiday time to let your grandchild know you are thinking about him/her. It is also a time to get to know each other more deeply. Share your own holiday memories and encourage your grandchild to do the same. Here are some topics you may want to include in your letter:

- ♥ Family or cultural traditions
- ♥ Visiting relatives and friends
- ♥ Giving and receiving gifts
- ♥ Letting people know you care about them.

Letters around the holidays can take on a festive tone. Families come together for Thanksgiving meals and for December holidays. Use your letters to bolster those experiences, and to remind children to count their blessings—in whatever form they may come. Holidays also offer time for reflection: Where do I go from here? How can I improve myself? If your junior partner opens the door for comments about self-direction and self-improvement, don't be afraid to open it wider with positive guidance.

During the holiday season children naturally think of gifts, school vacation, and being with family and friends. You may want to place your letter in a greeting card or celebrate the holiday season in some other way. For a gift, think about a book or a video that will remind your grandchild of the importance of education and learning. That doesn't mean your letter should carry a heavy message, but you can make your holiday greetings show the child you care deeply about his/her future as a person, a learner, and a citizen.

THANKSGIVING LETTERS

Ages 3-5

Dear Melanie,

Are you going to help the family with Thanksgiving dinner? It is a fun time to help each other, isn't it? Be sure to thank everyone for all they do for you. Will you draw a picture for me? Show me what you like about Thanksgiving or some other holiday.

Ages 6-8

Dear Bonnie,

Did you get all dressed up for Halloween? Are you going to have a turkey dinner on Thanksgiving?

It doesn't matter what you eat, but I do hope you take time to say thank you. Try always to keep a smile on your face. Maybe you could send me a picture of a happy family at their Thanksgiving meal.

Ages 9-12

Dear Al,

Do you have a friend from another country that doesn't celebrate Thanksgiving? If so, maybe you could talk with him or her about how they give thanks. I'd like to know if Jews or Muslims have another day for thanking their God.

The holiday season gives us some free time to think about the future. Have you decided what you want to do when you are grown up? Those vacation weeks would be a fine time to gather information at the library, and to discuss your dreams and desires with the family. I'm sure they will help you in many ways as you explore new ideas.

If I can help you to think through the education you will need for different occupations, just let me know. It will be fun for us to discuss your future in our letters. Have you thought about your future job?

Ages 13-16

Dear Rashonda,

The period of Thanksgiving to New Year's Day always seems hectic and overly busy to me. Do you have that feeling too? At the same time, I have such great fun with family and friends that I wouldn't want to miss any of it. It's more than good food and presents, isn't it? I like to feel the warmth and support I get from friends and family. I get a chance to remind myself how much I owe to my parents, brothers and sisters, wife and children, and friends. These people have helped me become the person that I am.

Do you spend time thinking about who you are and what you want to become? I still do, although I am decades older than you are. This is the time of year for me to challenge myself to become a better person. Frankly, I look at my family and friends for starters. What do some of them do that I would like to imitate? Can I use their model to do my job more effectively? Can I adopt their attitude, so I treat others better than I do?

BOOKS ABOUT THANKSGIVING

The week of Thanksgiving has been recognized by national organizations and a U.S. Senate resolution as National Family Week. Celebrate Family Week with the following books.

For Ages 3–5

***A TURKEY FOR THANKSGIVING*, by Eve Bunting** (Houghton Mifflin, 1995) $5.95. Mr. and Mrs. Moose try to invite Mr. Turkey to their Thanksgiving dinner.

***ONE TOUGH TURKEY*, by Steven Kroll, Illustrated by John Wallner** (Holiday House, 1982) $14.95. A recounting of the "real story" of the first Thanksgiving Day, when the Pilgrims pursued turkeys that were so tough, they had to settle for squash.

***CRANBERRY THANKSGIVING*, by Wende and Harry Devlin** (Four Winds Press, 1971) $14.95. Grandmother almost loses her secret recipe for cranberry bread to one of the guests invited for Thanksgiving Day. (The book includes the secret recipe.)

For Ages 6–8

***OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS*, by Lydia Child** (Holt, 1996) $15.95. A charming version of the old Thanksgiving poem (1844), transformed by colorful, witty illustrations into a complex adventure. Punctuated by a gorilla, a tube, and an airplane, the trip still ends comfortingly with Grandma's yummy pumpkin pie.

***PILGRIM VOICES. OUR FIRST YEAR IN THE NEW WORLD*, edited by Connie and Peter Roop** (Walker, 1995) $7.95. Nearly 400 years after their writing, the Pilgrims' journals are still the most dramatic accounts available of their daunting first year in America. They tell of relations forged between the Pilgrims and the Indians, the lives lost to disease and hardship, and the joy of the first Thanksgiving.

For Ages 9 –12

***FAMILY DINNER*, by Jane Cutler, Illustrations by Philip Caswell** (Farrar Straus, 1991) $13.95. "How in the world can you have a family if you don't have family dinner?" This is the big question Great-Uncle Benson asks ten-year-old Rachel when he rolls into town for a visit. Rachel is mystified. Her family doesn't "do" dinner. Soon Uncle Benson is cooking everything from Hundred Garlic Soup to Kansas City Macaroni and Cheese Casserole, intent upon luring the family to a communal meal.

***FIRST APPLE*, by Ching Yeung Russell** (Boyds Mill Press, 1994) $13.95. Living in China in the 1940s, a young girl works to save money to buy an apple and give it to her grandmother for her birthday. Neither has ever tasted an apple.

***GIVING THANKS*, by Chief Jake Swamp** (Lee and Low Books, 1997) $5.95. An appealing book on Native Americans, whose pictures make it suitable for younger children too.

For Ages 12 and up

***EATING THE PLATES. A PILGRIM BOOK OF FOOD AND MANNERS*, by Lucille Penner** (Macmillan, 1991) $14.95. How about some labscouse? Or plum duff? Here you'll find a description of these foods, plus a discussion of the eating habits, customs, and manners at the colony of New Plymouth.

***THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHILD'S HERITAGE COOKBOOK*, by Vanessa Parham** (Sandcastle Publishing, 1993) $19.95. This enjoyable cookbook has large, legible text, plus clearly stated ingredients and equipment. Young cooks learn math, time management, safety, and responsibility while keeping their ethnic heritage alive with African, Creole, Cajun, American Indian and Caribbean recipes.

VALENTINE'S DAY

LOVE OF WORDS, WORDS OF LOVE

Once while walking down a school hallway, I saw this little guy skipping along and reciting rhythmically, "Rumpelstiltskin, Rumpelstiltskin, Rumpelstiltskin." The sound of that word tasted so good that he just wanted to say it over and over. It was like eating ice cream.

Kids love words—new words, funny words, long words, words of love. They use them in their jump-rope games, in their quiet moments, in their silly hours.

The nineteenth century author, Edward Lear, became famous for his children's books of nonsense verse:

> *"There was an old man in a tree, who was horribly bored by a bee." (from BOOK OF NONSENSE)*

Lear's verse didn't have to make much sense because children could giggle at the silly images, and they savored the rhythmic patterns of the verse. I wonder if today's fascination with dinosaurs isn't related to children's interest in the large, strange-sounding names of brontosaurus, pterodactyl, tyrannosaurus rex.

Conversely, let us consider some other powerful words, not ones conveying images of physical strength, but ones of emotional strength. Is there anything more powerful than, "I love you"? Words of endearment or friendship cause all of us to relax and to become attached to the speaker.

A comedian was talking about his recent marriage:

"I just got married. She tricked me." "Tricked you?" "Yeah, she said that she liked me."

The audience snickered a bit, but he had actually uttered an enduring truth:

When someone says we are important, we will do almost anything for that person.

When we write to kids, we need to find ways to communicate to them that they are valuable, that they have a future, that someone supports them. Primarily we use words to express that powerful message of reassurance and friendship.

"I enjoyed your letter." "You must have been terrific in the school play." "I laughed out loud at the joke that you sent in your letter." "Your parents (teachers, friends) must be very proud of you, and so am I." "Here's a book (small gift) to celebrate your good grades."

You might also use special words as a way of telling your pen pal that you appreciate who they are. For instance:

> **"I think I will wear some perfume today to celebrate the good deed that you did. Thousands of years ago, people would burn flowers on special occasions to create a lovely smell. The word *perfume* means "through the smoke," (Latin: *per fumus*) indicating that the aroma of the flowers came through the smoke. It is similar to burning incense."**

Words of love and friendship naturally come to mind around Valentine's Day. It might be a good time to say, "You are special. I like what you do. Your letters are a flower in my month."

"Learning to Crochet"

by Brittany Shaffer, 2nd Grade

VALENTINE'S DAY LETTERS

Ages 3-5

Dear Mei-Yu,

Happy Valentine's Day and Happy New Year! You and I will celebrate two holidays. For Valentine's Day I have sent you some red heart-shaped stickers and for the Chinese New Year I have sent this picture of a dragon. He's very friendly looking for a dragon, don't you think? May he bring you much good luck throughout the year!

Ages 6-8

Dear Jeff,

Do you and your friends exchange Valentines? Isn't it great to let people know that you like them? I enjoy sending cards to people I like, hope you do too.

You can also show your friends you like them by doing something nice for them. Maybe you will want to do something special for someone in the family.

What are some things you like to do to show the family or your friends you like them? I'll look forward hearing about it in your next letter.

Ages 9-12

Dear Joy,

Your last letter was such fun to read! You lift my spirits just by writing me letters.

Some people may want candy or flowers as signs that someone loves them. Actually, I am more pleased with a card or letter. I guess I just need someone to tell me that I am okay, that they like me. Then I feel happy.

How about your friends? Do you think they are pleased just to get a note from you? Or do they need some kind of gift to know they are valuable?

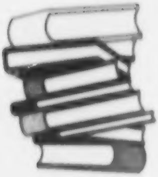
Ages 13-16

Dear Jeff,

Last night I went bowling with a friend of mine. He always wins because I am not a good bowler. He likes bowling, and that is the reason I go along—I want to show my friendship by doing something that he likes.

Sometimes my friend and I take long walks and we just talk and laugh about any old thing. I like to talk about books I read. He likes to talk about jokes he has heard. We have a great time together.

I guess most friendships are like that. Naturally we try to do things we both like. But we also try to do things that please our friends—just to show we like them. What do you and your friends do together?



BOOKS ON VALENTINE'S DAY

For Ages 3 and up

***LOVE BUGS*, by David Carter** (Simon and Schuster, 1995) $12.95. Have you hugged a bug today? Another ingenious, appealing book in Carter's popular series.

***VALENTINE CATS*, by Jean Marzollo** (Scholastic Books, 1996) $2.99. Valentine cats write poems/Valentine Cats paint too/Valentine Cats make valentines/Valentine Cats love you! *MEOW*! This book is especially appealing to cat-lovers, but charming for anyone who appreciates love stories.

***GUESS HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU*, by Sam McBratney** (Penguin, 1995) $14.50. This award-winning favorite for readers of all ages is the tale of Nutbrown Hare, who loves Big Nutbrown Hare all the way to the moon.

For Ages 6-8

***CUPID DOESN'T FLIP HAMBURGERS*, by Debbie Dadey** (Scholastic Books, 1995) $2.99. This is one of the popular Bailey School Kids series. Could the new cook in the school cafeteria really be Cupid cooking up love potions for lunch?

For Ages 9 and up

***ROSE DAUGHTER*, by Robin McKinley** (William Morrow, 1997) $14.50. The author of *BEAUTY* retells the story of Beauty and the Beast in this new rendition of the ultimate tale about the power of love.

Family Fun

BUILDING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

FAMILY TIES

Most of us want and seek support from our families for the good things that we try to accomplish in life. Even if no one else believes in us, we feel confident that our families do. That's one reason most of us return home periodically, no matter what the circumstances are in our lives. Family ties give us a sense of stability; they seem to be a launching pad for the next step in our lives.

Children need three stable things from their families: belief in them, encouragement, and support for the future. But today's family scene often makes it difficult for children to get such support from their parents. In 1960, only 16% of mothers with children under age 6 worked outside the home; in 1990 over 60% of that group were in the workplace. The growing number of single parents and the increasing percentage of two-income wage earners mean that families have less and less time to build the supportive relationships their kids need.

This is where you come in! We know from the biographies of many successful people that their grandparents provided that steady support. As you write to your grandchildren, suggest ways for them to create the close family relations that will nurture them in the years ahead. To foster the right supportive climate, encourage these youngsters to:

1. Seek family support
    - ♥ Ask for help with homework and other tasks
    - ♥ Confer with parents to solve tough problems
    - ♥ Solicit advice on growing up, on the future.
2. Do things that build family ties
    - ♥ Hold family parties
    - ♥ Keep a log of family legends and stories
    - ♥ Start a family scrapbook.
3. Write to various family members for information
    - ♥ Develop a family tree
    - ♥ Ask grandparents for the age and health of relatives
    - ♥ Get one good family story from each relative.

The summer months are especially good times to think about building family ties. Family outings, visits to relatives, merely the time to dream about the future; these are occasions for children to ask for continuing support from their families and to show their love and appreciation for members of their families.

If you write letters to a child who is not a member of your family, indeed you may become a surrogate family member. You can offer the support, advice, and encouragement a child needs to do well in school, to act responsibly, and to show care for other people. You can help a child to raise his or her expectations, to aim higher than his/her peers, and to think about life as a long-term journey, not merely a party for today. You may be surprised by the lasting influence your letters will have.

As grandparents we need to help children understand the benefits of the support they receive from their families. More importantly, we must encourage them to build a sense of family. Children should not only receive family support; they must also work on building support within their own families. We can remind our grandkids that they need to inform parents and other family members that they want their help and encouragement. Many people offer support primarily when someone asks for it. Children should not be afraid to ask for help from their family in homework, attending a child's performance, participating in school events, and so on.

On the other side, children must be willing to do their share to build a sense of family. Kids can organize family outings, suggest places the family can go, and prepare little celebrations for birthdays and similar events, when family ties contribute to the warmth of the event.

Childrens' Letters

Most of us tend to forget the great benefits that we receive from our families. I don't mean only the gift of life and the nourishment that we get from the family kitchen. We are nourished also by the contacts within our families and by the sense that we belong intimately to a group of people.

The desire for belonging to a family with its own history reveals its power through those people who lack that history in their lives. How else can we explain the great effort that adopted children will spend on locating their birth families? How else can we explain the deep sense of loss that people feel when war or other disasters tear them from their natural families and place them in foster homes elsewhere?

In numerous ways, then, we can aid our grandchildren by encouraging them to celebrate their families and the relationships they contain. Some of these sample letters promote the theme that we can celebrate family ties through hugs, humor, and just hanging around.

by Dusty Rhoades, 3rd grade

LETTERS ON FAMILY

Ages 3-5

Dear Craig,

Here is a picture of me and my brothers. I like this picture because we were having a good time. Can you find me in the picture?

Do you have a picture of you with your Mom and Dad that you really like? If so, why do you like it? Would you send me a copy of that picture?

Ages 6-8

Dear Diandra,

Thanks for the picture of you and Molly. It gave me a big smile.

I know that big sisters sometimes make us mad, but isn't it wonderful to know she is there with you? Why don't you surprise her and give her a big hug? Tell her you are glad she is your sister. Then watch a smile spread all across her face.

Let me know what happens.

This would be a good place to use a cartoon or a funny face drawing. Include illustrations in your letters whenever you feel they would be helpful. By drawing a smiling face or some funny face, you will give your letters a lighthearted flavor that kids always appreciate.

Ages 9-12

Dear Aimee,

Thanks for the illustration you sent. I liked it so much that I framed it and put it on my wall.

Everyone in the family must be very proud of your creativity. Do you have a folder or a portfolio of your drawings? It would be nice for visitors to see the fine work that you do. Then people will want to praise you and to act as your first critics.

Anytime you want to send me your drawings to get my opinion, please just pop them in the mail.

Ages 13-16

Dear Patrick,

Have you noticed that after having a fight some people joke around as a way of making up? When my parents argued over something, they would tease and joke about it afterwards. They would smile and end up hugging each other. It was their way of saying they still liked each other.

Don't you think people in families can tease and joke to ease tensions among them? Families seem to know that they must do something to smooth out their conflicts.

Once, after my wife and I had exchanged angry words, she turned her back and then said: "I haven't seen you like this since that stray cat pooped all over the car that you had just shined up." That broke me up, because I saw myself chasing this cat down the street yelling at it for its dirty deed. After I started to laugh, how could I be mad at my wife? I couldn't.

How about you? Can you think of times when a little joke might have calmed you or your parents?

BOOKS ABOUT FAMILIES

For Ages 3 and up

***WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT CINDY SNAPPLEBY*, by Barbara Samuels** (Orchard Books, New York, 1992) $3.98. Though Faye wants to be friends with the cool and confident Cindy Snappleby, she won't put up with Cindy's calling her little sister names. There may be sibling rivalry, but let's hear it for sibling loyalty too!

***IN DADDY'S ARMS I AM TALL*, by Javaka Steptoe** (Publishers Group, 1996) $14.50. Celebrating the bond among African-American fathers, children, and grandchildren, this collection of poetry, bursting to life with colorful illustrations, reminds us that family is our greatest gift.

For Ages 5 and up

***A KISS FOR LITTLE BEAR*, by Elsie Minarik** (Harper Collins, 1984) $3.75. A bestselling book in the popular *I Can Read* series. The bear family will enchant beginning readers.

***ALLISON*, by Allen Say** (Houghton Mifflin, 1996) $15.50. When Allison finds out she is adopted, she takes in a stray cat and learns the true meaning of adoption and parental love.

C 4

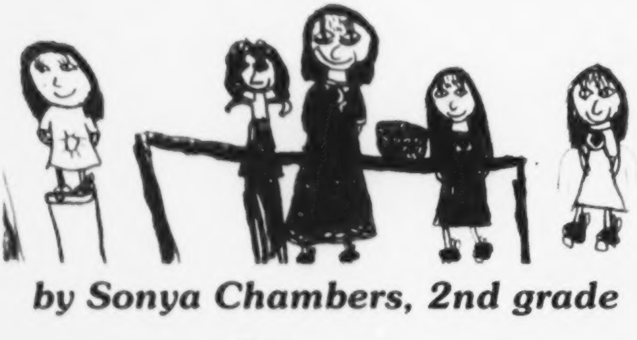
For Ages 9 and up

***FIRST CHILDREN GROWING UP IN THE WHITE HOUSE,* by Katherine Leiner**. (William Morrow, 1996) $20.00. This book has fascinating anecdotes about the children of our Presidents. It shows not only the perils and pleasures of growing up in the national spotlight, but also the importance of the strong family ties that have guided these children through their unusual experiences.

***THE BIRTH-ORDER BLUES,* by Joan Drescher**, (Viking/Penguin, 1993) $3.98. A school newspaper reporter surveys kids on how they feel about being born first, last, or in the middle of their family's hierarchy. Though the book is fiction, it is based on Ms. Drescher's experiences interviewing elementary school children who took part in a birth-order survey. The book offers suggestions on how to conduct such a survey among friends, and finds positive aspects to every position in the rank.

Ages 12 and up

***LITTLE HOUSE IN THE BIG WOODS,* by Laura Ingalls Wilder** (Harper Trophy, 1971) $4.95. Mrs. Wilder's books are best known as examples of historical fiction, but they focus on the inner workings of families too. Beginning in 1932 with *LITTLE HOUSE IN THE BIG WOODS* to *THESE HAPPY GOLDEN YEARS*, published in 1943, the series relates the sagas of the Ingalls girls and the Wilder boys. Mrs. Wilder includes details that give readers a sense of comfort and security.



by Sonya Chambers, 2nd grade

STORYTELLING

Books have become one of the best means for sharing experiences. But for thousands of years and in many cultures throughout the world today, storytelling has been the way older generations have passed down their wisdom to their children and grandchildren. You can combine this great tradition of oral history in your letter writing by making storytelling a regular part of your correspondence with your grandkids.

You could use storytelling as a way for you and your grandchild to learn more about each other. You also have first-hand knowledge of subjects that often play a large part in children's lives. For example, kids love to hear stories about things their parents did as kids. Through storytelling children can learn how time has changed life and the world around them. Below are a few questions that you may want to use as topics for exploring the past with your pen pal.

- ✔ What do you remember about your classroom?
- ✔ What was your greatest fear at school?
- ✔ How did you feel about homework and report cards?
- ✔ What was your favorite activity in school?
- ✔ How did you feel about your teachers?

***Source**: REDEFINING THE GRANDPARENT ROLE, by Robert and Shirley Strom. Office of Parent Development International Research and Development Reports, ERIC, 1982.*

USING FAMILY FOLK TALES

Sharing stories is a great way to communicate with children, and every family has its funny and strange tales. Here is one from an eight year old.

The Headless Rabbit

Once upon a time, in the mountains of Alabama, my Great Grandfather was going to visit a sick friend. There were no roads or cars, so he was walking on a trail across the mountains. It was beginning to get dark when he saw a strange figure coming toward him. Since he was a hunter and not afraid of things in the woods, he decided to wait on the trail for the approaching creature. It looked like a big white rabbit, but as it brushed past his leg he realized that the rabbit had no head and no tail. He turned and watched as the rabbit hopped out of sight.

When Great Grandfather got to his friend's house, he learned that his friend had passed away about the same time he had seen the rabbit on the trail. He wondered if the two events were related.

You may find this story hard to believe, but my Great Grandfather was not a drinking man, and he always told the truth. He lived to be 72 years old and said this was the only thing he ever saw that he couldn't explain.

Gentry

Gentry's grandmother told him that story about her father. You can encourage children to learn family history by telling tales from the good old days. They will enjoy these stories, and it may prompt them to write more. If their parents or other relatives aren't available for this kind of storytelling, ask them to get a story from an old-timer in the neighborhood.

When children ask for stories about their families, they sometimes hear things that make them terribly proud. Here's what a nine-year-old boy wrote when he was asked to tell a family story:

My Family

My family is a PROUD family. During the summer of 1863, my great-great-great grandmother Dora came to Shreveport on a steamboat. While working on the steamboat, she learned that she was a FREE woman. She had never experienced freedom before. Her descendants worked hard in Caddo Parish through the years.

Today my mom and dad are educators in Caddo Parish. My aunts and most of my uncles are, too. My favorite uncle lives in Saudi Arabia with his family. Each summer they fly to many countries and then visit me in Shreveport. The whole family gets together like the happy families on TV commercials. My grandparents love this, and so do I.

Heath

MAKING UP TALL TALES TOGETHER

Everyone likes a tall tale. Fanciful stories are as much fun to make up as they are to hear or tell. You might try writing a tall tale with your grandchild. You can do so by sending the story back and forth, so you can each contribute a line or a paragraph to the story. It might take two or three months to finish your tall tale through the mail, but think of the fun you'll have stretching your imaginations! If you are using electronic mail, you could make additions to the story day by day.

Here's an example of a fairy tale a grandmother and granddaughter wrote together. Grandma wrote the first lines, and her eight-year-old granddaughter finished them.

Once upon a time there was a beautiful...

...unicorn named Rebecca. And she was so beautiful that her horn and her heels were golden.

She lived in an enchanted woods, where...

...all the unicorns play. But she was sad because she had no wings to fly with.

And so many of the other unicorns teased her...

...but all the other unicorns were not as beautiful as she, and so she decided to make herself a pair of wings.

Every day for many moons Rebecca gathered golden pieces of straw...

...to make wings with. But the other unicorns did not think she could do it, so they laughed at her.

She did not give up, though; she kept working, and one night when the moon was full, she...

...realized she had grown beautiful wings, so she did not need the straw.

Rebecca said, "What shall I do with all this straw?" Suddenly, from a grove of tulip trees, she saw...

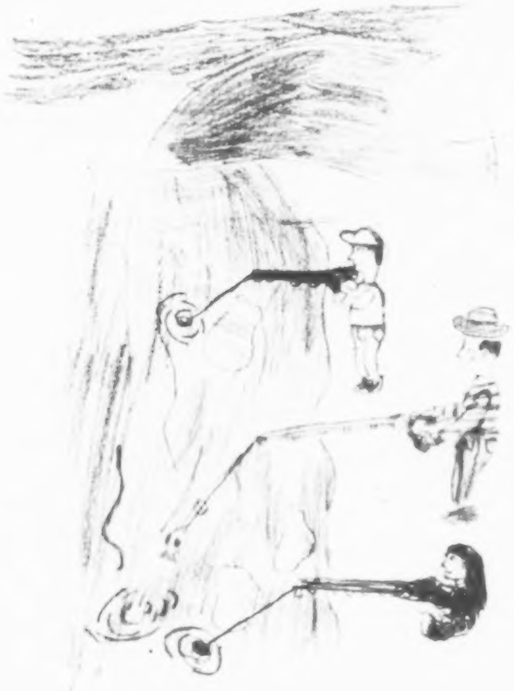
...a fairy who said to her, "Let me take the straw, please, and I will weave it into a golden castle for you to live in because you worked so hard to make wings."

"Besides, I love you and I want you to live happily forever..."

...And the other unicorns didn't tease Rebecca ever again, and they wished that they were as beautiful and they had a castle too.

THE END

You and your grandchild can also take turns illustrating each part as you write it.



By Catherine Hanson, 4th Grade

THE NEW EXTENDED FAMILY

Noted child psychologist Dr. Fitzhugh Dodson cited the importance of what senior citizens and school kids can gain by keeping in touch with one another.

I want to talk to you today about the waste of America's most valuable resource: old people, middle-aged people, and young people—sometimes called grandparents, parents, and children. Many of these vital people are failing to maximize their potential: to become the people they could be through interaction with one another. Too often, the lines of communication between the generations don't operate effectively, if at all, because sensitive and caring individuals have not learned the skills necessary to share their knowledge and feelings with the other generations. The costs of this failure are very great.

I don't mean to imply that our situation is a hopeless one. On the contrary, as serious as our challenges are, we are in a position to meet them and enhance the lives of our children and families. Our three generations, grandparents, parents, and children, because of age and psychological positions in the family, have unique qualities to contribute to the total family group and to each other. We all have something to teach to and learn from others, if we are able to communicate in a free and non-defensive way. And the children can only be healthier and happier as a result.

We are all aware that too often in the modern nuclear family, the generations live in psychologically watertight compartments, separate from one another. It seems clear that we must go beyond that structure if we are going to get the most out of the emotional and intellectual enrichment the three generations can offer one another.

That is why I talk about the new extended family, one in which each of us can participate. The new extended family can help give maturity, enrichment, and stability to the family unit. That is vitally important in this era of bewildering change.

This new family differs from traditional notions of the extended family because all three generations do not live under the same roof. And, in fact, they don't even have to be of the same family. The new extended family members are people who care about one another and have much to share—both grandparents and parents. They all learn to relate to children, to talk to them, and—though it's not always easy—to listen.

The Universal Value of Communication

It is often necessary in the new extended family for the older generation to understand the complexities of divorce and single-parent homes, and provide support, rather than unsolicited advice. It requires the ability to desensitize oneself to problems in the family that are not one's personal concern, and to know when to "butt out." The new extended family can only work if the parents, grandparents, or surrogate family members have the skills to communicate with one another.

Our children's schools teach them such fascinating and important topics as the geography of Brazil and the capitals of the 50 states. But they are not taught how to communicate with their own family, how to deal with an alcoholic father or a family splitting at the seams by divorce. Our schools can do more for children than fill them with facts. We need to experiment with the concept of the new extended family. I know this is a big job, but after all, we got to the moon, didn't we?

Source: *"Old and Young: Generations at the Crossroads." Testimony before the House of Representatives, Select Committee on Aging; Wednesday, Sept. 8, 1982.*

Dr. Dodson has also written several bestselling books: HOW TO PARENT, HOW TO FATHER, and HOW TO GRANDPARENT.

SHARING PERSONAL STORIES IN LETTERS

Ages 3-5

Dear Marion,

At your age I used to go fishing with my grandpa. He put a worm on the hook because I wouldn't touch the worm. I did catch a fish, but only one. Grandpa said I wiggled and jumped around too much, so I scared the fish away.

Will you send me pictures of things you like to do when you are with older people?

Ages 6-8

Dear Sam,

Everyone has good stories about their best friends. I have put a story in with this letter about the biggest adventure I had at age six with my best friend.

Will you tell me a story about an adventure you have had with a friend? What did that adventure teach you?

Keep those letters coming. I like to hear from you. You write such good letters!

Ages 9-12

Dear Jimmy,

My granddad liked to tell fables. He knew lots of them. Do you know what a fable is? It's a story that teaches a lesson, especially using animals.

Will you write back and tell me your favorite fable in your next letter? Don't forget the moral!

Ages 13-16

Dear Willie,

In your history class, do you ever think about what it would have been like to be a teen in another time? Can you imagine what a teenager did in colonial times, during the Gold Rush or the Civil War?

If you will tell me how teen life today is different from what it was at another time, I will reply with a true story about what teenage life was like when I was growing up.

BOOKS ABOUT STORYTELLING

For Ages 3-5

***NOW ONE FOOT, NOW THE OTHER*, by Tomie de Paola** (Putnam, 1981) $13.95. Bobby's best friend is his grandfather, Bob. When Bobby was five, his grandfather had a stroke and could not move or talk. Bobby talked to Bob and helped him get well. He was able to help his grandfather learn to walk, just as his grandfather helped him when he was little.

***GRANDMA GETS GRUMPY*, by Anna Grossnickle Hines** (Houghton Mifflin, 1990) $5.95. All the children love to stay with Grandma. She reads to them, feeds them hot dogs for dinner, and doesn't complain when they make a mess with their toys. When all the cousins spend the night together at her house, they find out that even Grandma can get grumpy, but she still loves them.

For Ages 6-8

***NANA UPSTAIRS & NANA DOWNSTAIRS*, by Tomie de Paola** (Puffin Books, 1978) $4.99. Tommy spends Sunday afternoons with his active grandmother, whom he calls Nana Downstairs and his frail great-grandmother, whom he calls Nana Upstairs. This is a tender story about Tommy's childhood memories of them.

***THE NAPPING HOUSE*, by Audrey Wood** (Harcourt Brace, 1996) $5.95. In this cozy tale, a snoring granny, a dozing dog, a slumbering mouse, and several other creatures all take a nap at the same time on the same bed. Everyone is sleeping soundly until a flea wakes up and chaos begins.

For Ages 9-12

***NO BATH TONIGHT*, by Jane Yolen** (Crowell, 1987) **$12.99.** Every day for a week Jeremy has been hurt in some way or another and cannot take a bath. His grandmother arrives on Sunday for a visit. She not only makes Jeremy some "kid tea," she also lures him into the bathtub.

***THE PATCHWORK QUILT*, by Valerie Flournoy** (Dial Books, 1985) **$14.99.** Soon after Tanya and her grandmother begin making a quilt, her grandmother becomes ill. Tanya tries to finish the quilt alone. By the time the quilt is finished, the entire family has helped, and Grandmother has recovered. Every piece of material represents a memory for each relative, so the quilt becomes a family storybook.

***THE GREAT GILLY HOPKINS*, by Katherine Paterson** (Harper Trophy, 1987) **$4.50.** A Newbery Honor Book and winner of twelve other awards. Gilly is a swearing, self-sufficient girl who is in and out of foster homes. When she arrives at her next home, Gilly can't stand the huge and semi-literate Maime Trotter. But Maime teaches Gilly how to give and accept love, thus preparing her for a reunion with her real family.

For Ages 13-16

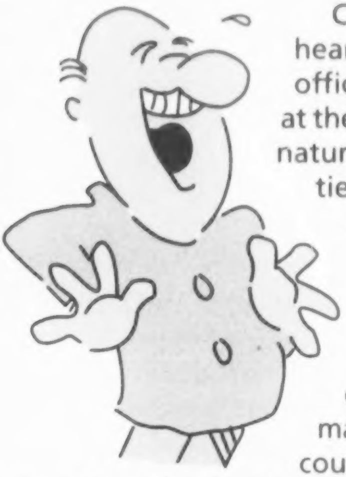
***IF I LOVE YOU, AM I TRAPPED FOREVER?* By M.E. Kerr** (Harper Collins, 1988) **$4.95.** Alan Bennett, this humorous book's narrator, lives in upstate New York with his mother and his grandfather. Alan's father deserted them five years ago. Alan, who describes himself as "very handsome, very cool, the most popular boy at Cayuga High," thinks his life in general and especially his love life with Leah are perfect in every way. That is so until Duncan Stein becomes the new boy in town; then everything falls apart.

***TUCK EVERLASTING*, by Natalie Babbitt** (Houghton Mifflin, 1995) **$9.00.** In this exciting adventure story, a young girl stumbles on the Tuck family's home in frontier country and learns their great secret.

HUMOR

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED

by Joyce McMahan Cookman



Carl Smith laughs. A lot. One often hears peals of laughter coming from his office as he meets with his employees at the Family Literacy Center. He's a good-natured teaser. Sometimes he even wears ties with cartoon characters on them. Let me tell you about the powerful and long-term effects of such a sense of humor.

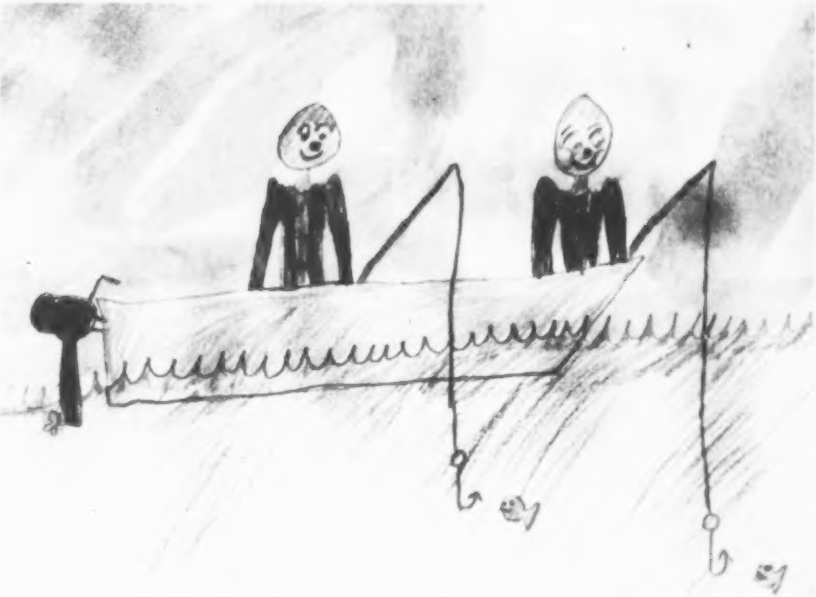
As a boy growing up in Scottsburg, IN, James F. Everitt, Jr. discovered he had the ability to make people laugh—especially his first cousins, Judy and Joyce McMahan. Jim got able assistance in this humor production from his older brothers Ed, now of Indianapolis, and Tom, of Portland, OR. While the youngest McMahan sisters were Jim's prime audience, he had the same effect on the rest of the family. He delivered the bulk of his original material as quick wit and verbal repartee; but he wasn't above (or below) matching his Aunt Jean McMahan, pun for pun.

The McMahan sisters began to notice a unique aspect of being near Jim and his comic delivery. They only had to be with him briefly to start laughing, but then they quickly got the hiccups. Soon the sisters noticed they could measure the laughter = hiccups pattern. The usual elapsed time for hiccup eruption was 10 to 15 minutes.

Now Mr. Everitt is, well, not quite so young, but he's still funny. He also works for the Internal Revenue Service, a fact that some of his relatives find amusing. He doesn't have the opportunity to make the McMahan family laugh as often as he once did. The distances separating the McMahan and Everitt families make that difficult to achieve. But at Thanksgiving this year, cousins Jim Everitt and Judy McMahan Himelick had the chance to spend a few hours together. For the record: The hiccups began within eight minutes of their initial greeting.

So: my recommendation for humorous letters to grandchildren is: give them the hiccups! Send some jokes; clip a cartoon or laughter-provoking picture; recommend funny books; suggest a comic TV program, film, or play—whatever you think the child might enjoy.

Challenge them to give you hiccups too! Tell them you're trying to beat a record set by some guy from Indiana.



by Tyler DeLong, 4th grade

HUMOROUS LETTERS

Ages 3-5

Dear Clark,

Thank you for the wonderful drawings of you and your Dad laughing. Did you share a joke? I always like your drawings—especially because you made them!

Ages 6-8

Dear Rosalind,

I hope you like this picture of my dog Rose. Doesn't she look funny with her head sticking out of the snow like that? She does love this white stuff. It's a good thing she's all black, or we'd never find her in those snow drifts.

Ages 9-12

Dear Jerry,

Here's a joke your uncle told me. (He heard it on a radio program he likes, "Prairie Home Companion".)

A chicken walks into a library. The chicken walks up to the librarian and says, "Bucck!" The librarian says, "You want a book?" "Bucck!" So the librarian gives the chicken a book. The chicken walks off, comes back later and says, "Bucck, bucck!" The librarian says, "You want two books?" "Bucck, bucck!" So the librarian gives the chicken two books.

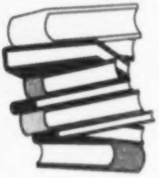
The chicken walks off, comes back later and says, "Bucck, bucck, buuucck!" The librarian says, "You want three books, two short and one long?" "Bucck, bucck, buuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck!" So the librarian gives the chicken three books. By now the librarian is curious, so he follows the chicken. The chicken hops to a swamp. Then, it walks up to a big bullfrog and says "Bucck, bucck, buuuuuuuuuck!" And the bullfrog says, "Rrrrrrrrrrrread it."

Ages 13-16

Dear Charlotte,

Do you watch much TV? If you do, I would like you to tell me which shows you enjoy because you find them funny. You can see some old shows I used to think were funny on the Nickelodeon Channel. Do you ever watch them?

Speaking of the Nickelodeon Channel, I think it shows the old Warner Brothers cartoons too. As a kid I would watch those cartoons at the movie theater before the feature film. At this time cartoon characters weren't yet "superheroes." However, some cartoons would have Bugs Bunny outsmarting World War II enemies. I remember asking my dad who the characters were, not recognizing some "toon" was supposed to be Hitler or Mussolini. Maybe today's cartoons haven't changed so much; they just have different enemies to fight? Can you think of some current cartoons that still use satiric humor?



BOOKS TO MAKE YOU LAUGH

Here's something to smile about: There are so many funny books available we can enjoy a laugh a day well into the next millennium. Since it's impossible to review all of these books, here are some humorous writers, illustrators, and cartoonists popular with young readers. Have fun!

Author/Illustrator - Rosemary Wells

Ms. Wells' publisher is Dial Books for Young Readers. Her cherubic and often messy animal characters with very human characteristics are funny and lovable. Some titles to look for: ***Max's Chocolate Chicken***, $9.95; ***Max's Dragon Shirt***, $13.99; and ***Max's Christmas***, $11.99.

Author/Illustrator - James Marshall

Consider this blurb about *THE CUT-UPS*: "Snorkeling in the bath (the room, not the tub), inciting riots in the local movie house (I thought you had the snake), tormenting their school principal (Lamar J. Spurgle)," and you'll see why these books tickle the funny bone. Some titles to look for: ***George and Martha. The Complete Stories of Two Best Friends*** (Houghton Mifflin, 1997) $25.00; ***The Stupids Have a Ball*** (Houghton Mifflin, 1984) $5.95; ***The Stupids Step Out*** (Houghton Mifflin, 1989) $8.95; and ***The Cut-ups*** (Houghton Mifflin, 1986) $4.99.

Author/Illustrator - James Stevenson

Adult readers may recognize Stevenson's droll wit from his cartoons in *The New Yorker*. Favorite kids' books feature Grandpa and Uncle Wainey, shown as youngsters of maybe eight and three but sporting the mustaches they also have as adults. Wainey has a tendency to say mostly, "Wah!" and

"Yumpf." ***Could Be Worse*** (Greenwillow, 1987) $3.95, ***The Worst Goes South*** (William Morrow, 1995) $15.00, and ***National Worm Day*** (Greenwillow, 1990) $12.95.

Author/Illustrator - Susan Meddaugh

When Martha the dog (from ***Martha Speaks*** [Houghton Mifflin, 1995] $4.95) ate only dog food, all she could say was "woof!" But after Martha eats alphabet soup she talks and talks and talks. Among her many ruminations: "Beware of two-year-olds with clothes pins. Under the table is the very best place to be during a meal. If it's black and white and smells funny, it's not a cat. Don't chase it! And while we're on the subject, I understand cat but I can't speak it." Other books by Susan Meddaugh: ***Tree of Birds*** (Houghton Mifflin, 1994) $4.95; and ***Beast*** (Houghton Mifflin, 1985) $3.95.

Author/Illustrator - Daniel Pinkwater

Some of Mr. Pinkwater's books are mysteries, some are science fiction. All of them are zany. Among his titles: ***Lizard Music*** (Bantam, 1988) $3.99; and ***The Hoboken Chicken Emergency*** (Simon and Schuster, 1990) $12.95.

Author - Beverly Cleary

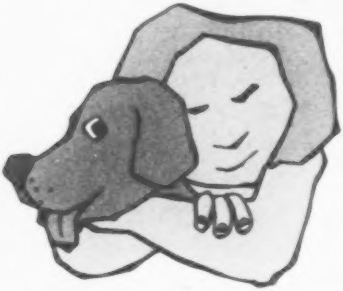
Ms. Cleary has been writing entertaining books for 40 years. Some of her funniest books include: ***Beezus and Ramona*** (Avon, 1990) $4.50; and ***The Mouse and the Motorcycle*** (Avon, 1996) $4.50.

Cartoonists - Jim Davis, Bill Amend

Jim Davis produces that funny feline Garfield; Bill Amend creates the Fox Trot series. The Fox family hasn't reached the marketing pinnacle that Garfield has, but they are gaining broad popularity. ***Garfield Thinks Big*** (Ballantine, 1997) $6.95, and ***Fox Trot En Masse**. **A Fox Trot Treasury*** (Andrews and McMeel, 1992) $12.95.

PETS

PETS HUMANIZE AND ENDEAR THEMSELVES



One of Disney's most successful animated movies was *TOY STORY*. In it the toys come alive to carry out their own adventures, while the human family goes about its other business.

Most children could probably better imagine that their pets take on adventures and stories, as pets seem to acquire human characteristics. We often link them to the joys and sadness of our lives. Dogs and cats not only greet us at the door when we come home, but also listen to us talk about our successes and failures.

Pet Stories Entertain

How often have you seen movies in which a pet gets lost, and the human searches for the pet until they are reunited joyfully? I have often seen signs posted about lost dogs. From time to time in my mailbox I get an announcement asking me to look for a lost pet.

The Smartest Dog

My father-in-law claimed to have the smartest dog in the world. Jacques, his poodle, would listen to him attentively and sometimes do what my father-in-law told him. But the important part of their relationship was that Jacques listened to him almost all the time. Haven't you heard other people brag about how smart their pets are?

One school principal I knew had a pet parrot, "the smartest parrot in the world." The principal thought the bird picked up language on his own. For example, one day the bird turned to the principal, Bodie, and said: "More bourbon, Bodie." What

Mr. Bodie didn't know was that teachers would come into his office and teach the parrot these expressions, then they seemed to pop out of the parrot's mouth randomly. Once when the superintendent was in the principal's office, the parrot yelled: "Bodie beat me! Bodie beat me!"

Primarily, pets give us companionship and affection. When my daughter comes home from work every night, her cat Jasmine greets her at the door and sits on her lap as she reads or watches television. It is quite clear that they are good buddies.

Stories to Share

Almost all of us have a pet story: if not our own, then a neighbor's. There are hero dogs like Lassie, and there are cunning cats like Garfield. I have heard pet stories about turtles, horses, boa constrictors, and pigeons. They make great stories because most of us can relate to the role a pet plays in our lives. Why not tell a pet story to your grandchild, and ask him/her to tell you a favorite pet story?

Encourage your pen pal to draw a picture or send a photograph of the pet s/he is telling about. I know that not everyone has a pet, but we all seem to realize that a pet story is actually a human story, and it warms them to tell it. Pets often become part of the quality of our own lives: of our joys and sorrows, troubles and pleasures. No wonder no one can resist listening to a pet story, even when someone tells you how smart his very ordinary dog is.

MONSIEUR O'REILLY CAPTURES SAN FRANCISCO HEARTS

by Joyce McMahan Cookman

O'Reilly is the teacher's pet. Leah Finch, teacher at the French-American International School in San Francisco, would be the first to admit it. But the students don't seem to mind. In fact, O'Reilly is everyone's favorite. O'Reilly, a five-year-old Golden Retriever, is a service dog who assists Leah when her multiple sclerosis prevents her from performing various tasks in the classroom or at home.

O'Reilly is in command

Last year, when 14 of Leah's third graders served as junior partners, they bragged about how much O'Reilly knew: "O'Reilly knows about ten commands," they underestimated. "I like Leah as a teacher, and I like having O'Reilly in my class," one said in summary.

Leah teaches a small group, with just three students in her English as a Second Language class. She also reports good results from her current medication, which has enabled her to return to walking and not using her wheelchair. Still, O'Reilly is busy assisting Leah, providing a comforting presence for her present students, and receiving loving visits from others in the school.

"O'Reilly actually knows between 60 and 70 commands," Leah said, "though he's probably forgotten some of those because he hasn't used some of them in awhile."

After you. No, after you.

For example, O'Reilly can turn on a light switch or open a refrigerator door. He can also open and close classroom doors if they have certain types of handles. In the classroom he can retrieve a pencil that rolls under Leah's desk, or pass out papers to students. He knows which child is which, for personalized deliveries. "I do put the kids' papers in Zip-Loc bags so no one gets a paper back with slobber on it," Leah laughingly explained.

O'Reilly also wears a backpack, so he can tote books and materials for Leah. "Except sometimes now he manages to take off the backpack," Leah said. "I was at the school copier the other day; I looked down and there he was—naked! He'd gotten out of the backpack."

Speaking the language

"All the kids love O'Reilly," Leah said. They frequently say they want to be in Ms. Finch's class because of him. "O'Reilly loves all the kids too," Leah said. "I once had a student who refused to speak. He finally did when he discovered he could speak to O'Reilly and give him commands."

O'Reilly provides a comforting sight, particularly for many students who may be far from their home countries, or feel a bit anxious with the academic rigor of the school. All classes at this French-American school are taught in English and French. Some students are only in the United States for the year, while their parents pursue additional training or conduct international business. While many of the American-born children have at least one parent whose first language is French, several others attend the school simply because their parents want them to reap the benefits of a challenging bilingual education. Having a fluffy blond dog to pet can be a nice substitute when a security blanket isn't handy.

When not busy sharing his love with students, O'Reilly also works his magic at home. Leah recently adopted two sons, a four-year-old and a 20-month-old. In fact, Leah wondered if O'Reilly's recent maneuver of shedding his backpack was inspired by her baby's sleight-of-hand in unbuckling his car seat.

Recommended Reading

Ms. Finch suggests a book about service dogs like O'Reilly, ***MY BUDDY***, by Audrey Osksy. (Holt, 1994) $5.95. *MY BUDDY* profiles dogs just like O'Reilly, with one exception—the other service dogs are probably not bilingual.

LETTERS ON PETS

Ages 3-5

Dear Emily,

Your Mom told me that you have a new kitten. I know you will help take care of her and give her lots of love. Did you give her a name yet?

Kittens are so cute. Please draw a picture of your new kitten and send it to me.

Ages 6-8

Dear Duncan,

Do you have any pets in your classroom? When I was in second grade, I remember that my teacher had a big fish tank in our classroom. She also had some turtles. We took turns feeding the fish and turtles each day. I think now teachers have more unusual pets in their rooms. For example, I know a teacher with a tarantula spider in his classroom. What do you suppose you feed a tarantula?

Ages 9-12

Dear Carlotta,

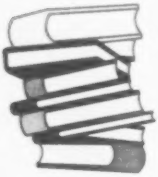
I had never thought much about wolves until you told me about your class project. I always thought wolves were frightening animals. But thanks to you, I have changed my viewpoint. In fact, as you can tell from the articles I've sent, I am finding information about wolves everywhere. I saw two of these stories in the newspaper, and I came across the other one on the Internet. I think the information about "wolf body language" is especially interesting. Some of it applies to dogs. I tell Duchess she is not the Alpha Dog around our house, but she just looks at me and grins.

Ages 13-16

Dear Chase,

Let me share with you a Wizard story that continues to make me laugh since he was a puppy ten years ago. The Wire Fox Terrier breed generally attaches itself to a single family member, so in our home, Wiz "belongs" to my wife. When she's at home, Wiz lies or sits next to her constantly. I can call him to come, but he ignores me totally. Even if he's asleep his eyelids don't flutter.

After Grandma leaves for work in the morning, Wiz will generally remain sleeping on the sofa. As you probably know, dogs can hear and smell hundreds of times better than we humans. So even if I try to pull one banana from a bunch on the countertop as quietly as possible, it only takes two seconds for Wiz to appear in front of me, as he sits looking up to await that small bit of the banana that he knows I'll give him. He is one funny dog!



BOOKS ABOUT ANIMALS

For Ages 3 and up

***WILL'S MAMMOTH,* By Rafe Martin. Illustrated by Stephen Gammell** (Putnam, 1989) $4.95. Though his parents explain that there have been no mammoths for over 10,000 years, Will goes out to play in the snow one day, confident of finding his old pet.

***ARTHUR'S PET BUSINESS,* by Marc Brown** (Joy Street Books, 1990.) $15.95. Arthur's determination to prove he is responsible enough to have a puppy brings him a menagerie of animals to care for. This is one of many "Arthur Adventures."

For Ages 5 and up

***THE NIGHT I FOLLOWED THE DOG,* by Nina Laden** (Chronicle Books, 1994) $13.95. Readers and dog owners of all ages will enjoy this delightful book, which begins, "I knew something was funny when I opened the door... and I saw my dog jump out of a limousine wearing a tuxedo...."

For Ages 8 and up

***WORDS WITH WRINKLED KNEES. ANIMAL POEMS,* by Barbara Juster Esbensen. Illustrated by John Stadler** (Crowell, 1986) $11.95. A collection of poems about words that express the essence of the animals they identify.

***DOGS TO THE RESCUE,* by Jeannette Sanderson** (Scholastic, 1997) $2.99. As a young reader said, "I like dogs. I like to see them rescue people."

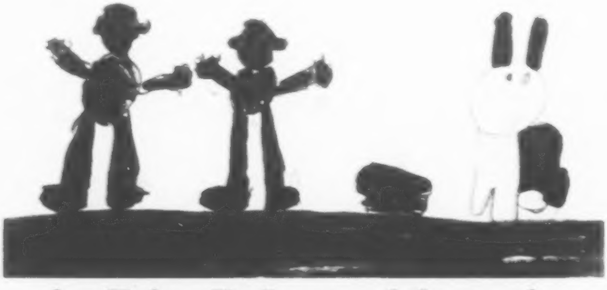
THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF DOGS. A&E Home Video. $59.95. An eight-year-old commented, "This is something you could probably watch again and again and not get bored."

***FOR KIDS: FISH. AN ASPCA PET CARE GUIDE*, by Mark Evans** (Dorling Kendersley, 1993) $9.95. Describes how to set up and maintain an aquarium, plus how to care for fish as household pets. It also teaches children how to be caring and responsible pet owners.

For Ages 12 and up

***THE TRUMPET OF THE SWAN*, by E.B. White** (Harper Collins, 1970) $3.95. Louis is a trumpeter swan with a terrible problem: unlike his brothers and sisters, he can't make a sound. His father says he'll help, as will a human friend, Sam Beaver, a boy who loves all wild animals. The story is a classic by the master writer who also delighted us *with CHARLOTTE'S WEB* and *STUART LITTLE*.

***KING OF THE WIND*, by Marguerite Henry** (Simon and Schuster, 1948.) $3.95. Calling all horse lovers ... and even those mildly interested in them. Ms. Henry's books revolve around horses and are classics, both for their ability to entertain and enlighten. *KING OF THE WIND* tells of a devoted stableboy and the golden Arabian stallion, Sham, that he saves. The book also provides a historical view of the Arabian breed's influence on American thoroughbreds.



by Tyler DeLong, 4th grade

Using the Seasons

WINTER

STOP, LOOK, LISTEN, AND SHARE

Winter brings some unique opportunities at my house. I live in central Indiana, where snow covers the landscape from time to time. More than any other time of the year, I enjoy looking out my window after the snow has fallen. I have more to observe, it seems, when the trees are covered with snow than during any other season.

By looking across my backyard into a clump of trees, I can tell who has been walking there during the night. Over time, I have learned to recognize the tracks of dogs, raccoon, opossum, deer, and birds. Many mornings after a snow, I see they have all been in my yard before I came to the window to greet the day. That's when I wish one of my grandchildren could stand there with me, so I could teach her to observe the tracks and think about what the animals were doing while we slept.

In the clump of trees separating me from my neighbor, I can watch the large blackbirds that have piled up a huge nest high up in the tree tops. They fuss around that nest and call to each other in their raucous, caw-caw voices. I often wonder what they are communicating as they yell at each other and occasionally swoop to the ground to inspect something in my backyard. I need to watch more carefully, to see if there is any pattern to their yells and romps in the snow.

The winter also reveals the trees and the landform around me, showing shapes and contours that I would find hard to imagine in the Spring and Summer, when the trees and the grass are full. Then I can't see my neighbor's house. And I cannot see the wash on one side of my yard, where the deer and the raccoon scramble up from the creek about 250 feet below the level of my yard. Some mornings I am lucky enough to see deer picking their way up the wash from the creek, looking for apples left on my apple tree.

On a snow-covered morning, I look out my window and ask: "What is different today? What can I learn today?" Again I wish a grandchild were near—to observe and learn with me.

With the simplest direction we can turn children into observers. With the easiest of suggestions, we can turn their observations into learning. Observation can also be a ritual, as in the observation of a feast day. When I look out my window on a snowy morning, I stand in awe while I also seek to learn.

LETTERS ON COLD WEATHER

Ages 3-5

Dear Jillian,

Are you getting out at all in the winter weather? Here's a picture of me shoveling snow. We have plenty of it!

If it's too cold to go out, you can always enjoy watching birds or squirrels running in the snow. Could you send me a drawing of what you see out your window?

Ages 6-8

Dear Alex,

Thanks for telling me about your geography report on the Inuits of Alaska. I learned a lot from you! Your letter made me notice the newspaper article I'm sending. I wouldn't have read it if you hadn't written about the Inuits. The article makes me sad, because it says that these Eskimos are being turned into tourist attractions. I thought you would like to read it, I know you are concerned about them. I'm glad you care about people from other cultures.

Ages 9-12

Dear Victoria,

Thanks for the letter describing your soccer games. You painted a real "word picture" of the action. I'll try to paint one for you about our dog's reactions to the winter.

As you know, Rose is part Labrador retriever. If you look up Labrador on a globe you'll find it in northeastern Canada. Well, Rose is definitely a cold-weather dog. In the summer she lies around and pants a lot. But cold and snow bring our her Arctic heritage.

When we go outside, she leaps up in the air, and is as frisky as a puppy. When we go to the meadow, she races like the wind. But our recent snow was up to her chest. So instead of running, she moved like a porpoise. She leaped out of the snow, dived back down, leaped up, dove back.

When she's in the snow she never acts tired and never wants to go home. But you know that Rose is nine years old. When she gets home, she naps for the rest of the day.

As you requested, in my next letter I'll send a picture of Rose—napping, no doubt!

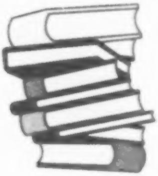
Ages 13-16

Dear Jonathan,

We saw on the news about that phenomenal snowstorm you had. I tried calling several times, but the circuits were jammed. Are things getting back to normal now?

You must have loved the days of no school. Did you catch up on reading, watch movies, or what? Whenever I get stuck inside for a while, I dread being deprived of my regular activities. But then I quickly find things to do at home. Grandma complains most of being unable to get away from the kitchen.

Please write soon and tell us what you're doing to combat cabin fever.



BOOKS FOR WINTER READING

Reading educators know that recreational reading improves children's overall reading skills. In winter, reading becomes an activity that children can participate in to pass the time inside. These books are full of adventures that will sweep children into another world composed of everything from a dancing donkey to the classic tale of *TREASURE ISLAND*. They will enhance your junior partner's reading skills and provide the enjoyment of a fun-filled story.

For Ages 3 and up

***MY FIRST ABC*, by Marie-Agnes Gaudrat and Thierry Courtin** (Barron's, 1994) $12.95. A delightful book, full of colorful illustrations depicting the alphabet in both upper and lower cases. There are also helpful learning hints to make letter recognition easier for preschool children.

***GOD'S QUIET THINGS*, by Nancy Sweetland. Illustrated by Rick Stevens** (Eerdmans, 1994) $15.00. This book draws children's attention to the quiet things in the world that often go unnoticed. It is a nice bedtime book for younger children and contains vibrant illustrations of nature.

For Ages 6-8

***ZONKEY THE DONKEY*, by Virginia Athey** (Lucky Books, 1993) $6.50. A tale about a lazy donkey, whose owner decides he is useless and decides to sell him at the fair. At the fair Zonkey dances for fair-goers, who toss him dimes for his performance. Farmer Gray decides to keep Zonkey, so he returns to the farm and continues to dance.

***TALES FOR A WINTER'S EVE,* by Wendy Watson** (Farrar, Straus, 1988) $10.95. Poor Freddie Fox. He hurt himself skiing and must make his way home in the dark. But once there, Mama Fox has dinner waiting and other relatives and friends make him feel better by entertaining him with a special tale. This story is perfect for reading aloud at bedtime.

For Ages 9-12

***A CHARTREUSE LEOPARD IN A MAGENTA LIMOUSINE (And Other Words Named After People and Places),* by Lynda Graham-Barber. Illustrations by Barbara Lehamm** (Hyperion Books, 1994) $14.95. We observe things like jeans, hamburgers or shopping malls all the time. Do we stop to think why they have those names? This book of toponyms—words that are named after a place, and eponyms—words named after a person, will provide readers with humorous and informative explanations of over 150 words.

***BLACK PEOPLE WHO MADE THE OLD WEST,* by William L. Katz** (Africa World Press,1992) $14.95. Thirty-five short biographical sketches of black men and women who were instrumental in settling the middle and western United States.

***THE THINK BOOK,* by Marilyn Burns** (Incentive Publishing, 1990) $16.95. A book that teaches kids how to solve puzzling problems, and challenges them to use their critical-thinking abilities in a fun and creative way.

***THE DOOR IN THE WALL,* by Marguerite de Angeli** (Dell, 1997) $2.69. A young boy named Robin journeys through England when the threat of war is very near. The Welsh attack the castle where his father is staying, and it is up to Robin to save his father and his country.

For Ages 13-16

***SPACE CHALLENGER: THE STORY OF GUION BLUFORD,* by Jim Haskins and Kathleen Benson** (Lerner Publishing, 1984) $16.00. Underlining the values of hard work, commitment, and family support, this is the inspiring story of the first black American to fly into space. Discouraged in high school from attending college, Guion Bluford went on to become a combat pilot, receive a Ph.D. in aerospace engineering, and fly on the Challenger's second flight as mission specialist.

***TREASURE ISLAND,* by Robert Louis Stevenson** (Random House, 1998) $7.99. This classic tale of piracy and buried treasure is an adventure full of excitement. A story that all teenagers will enjoy.

***SUSAN BUTCHER AND THE IDITAROD TRAIL,* by Ellen M. Dolan** (Walker, 1993) $15.95. This book describes the annual dog sled race from Anchorage to Nome, Alaska, and the life of the first woman to win it for three consecutive years. The Iditarod race has its origins in the efforts of mushers to deliver life-saving diphtheria medicine to children.

SPRING

DRAWING TO COMMUNICATE

My four-year-old granddaughter sent me a picture of Cinderella in her ball gown—not white, but pink and blue and maroon. It was signed simply, "Love, Nicole." She colored the picture from an old-fashioned coloring book after hearing the story of Cinderella.

When I write to my grandchildren, I usually send a very brief message (that their parents can read to them) and a picture—a photograph or a picture cut out of a newspaper or magazine. Pictures give us a way to communicate with children before they learn to read and write with standard print. Pictures remind youngsters that you are thinking of them and love them.

The same statement applies to older children. A drawing or a photograph may often send the message that you want to offer. A picture postcard, for example, says clearly: "I'm enjoying myself and thinking of you." Nice message.

In Spring we all want to get outside, to enjoy the warmer weather. You can use your grandchild's natural love of outdoor play as a topic for letters about those activities. Ask what games the child plays with friends, or if they go to a park together. You can add news of what you do in Spring too: gardening, walking, tennis, golf, etc..

Another Way of Learning

Our Family Literacy Center has a videotape, *Make a Difference: Talk about Books*, that shows families how to converse about books they read together. One strategy shows a father and two boys reading *Treasure Island* together. After finishing a chapter, they each draw a picture that represents a feeling or idea they want to share. Then they talk about their drawings and compliment each other for what they expressed. They enjoy communicating through their illustrations, and they learn each other's thoughts in a way that does not need words.

A 12-year-old boy with whom I share letters said he was having difficulty figuring out his math problems. At the time, he was working on a way to determine the area of a triangle. I suggested he draw a picture as he worked through his math problems; perhaps his drawings would help him see more clearly what he had to do. He then sent back his drawings and notes for a problem as his way of thanking me for the idea. Drawing did in fact help him solve the problems more easily.

As you know, psychotherapists sometimes ask clients to draw a picture that represents their feelings. The therapist hopes to learn through images what may not reveal itself through words. Not everyone is articulate enough to describe all that resides in his or her mind. Drawing becomes another way to communicate feelings and ideas.

Pictures also make you and your life vivid for your grandchild. They give a sense of your reality, your personality. More importantly, pictures tell grandchildren that they too can communicate effectively through drawing or pictures.

by Jessica Mitchell, 6th grade

LETTERS ABOUT SPRING

Ages 3-5

Dear Jordan,

I'm sending you this picture of a cactus growing in our yard. You can also see our view of the mountains. Would you send me a drawing of a tree growing in your yard?

Ages 6-8

Dear Emma,

You are such a good artist. I have tacked the latest drawing you sent me to my office bulletin board. Whenever my co-workers come in, they stop to admire your work and ask, "Who's the artist?" I'm always proud to say, "Oh, my granddaughter Emma drew it." You have turned my office into an art gallery.

Ages 9-12

Dear Phoebe,

I'm glad you liked the newspaper pictures of the snowstorm. Do you ever wish you lived in a state that had snow? My sons used to like the snow in December and January because school was cancelled on some days, so they had fun sledding and building a snow fort. But soon they would want the weather to be warm, so they could ride their bikes. Tell me what kind of outdoor activities you're enjoying.

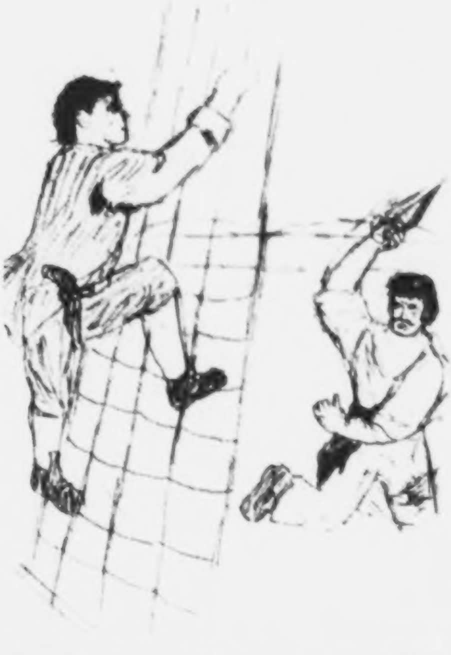
Ages 13-16

Dear Mike,

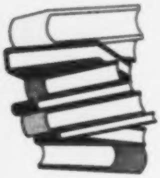
I was talking to a boy who was reading ***TREASURE ISLAND,*** by Robert Lewis Stevenson. He showed me a sketch he had drawn after reading a chapter. Here is the drawing.

I thought it was a great way to help a reader visualize the setting or the action of a story. What do you think of the idea?

Sometimes I draw charts or graphs when I am trying to understand a historical account. If you do things like that, perhaps you would be willing to share some of your sketches with me.



by Colin J.S. Cookman, 5th grade



BOOKS FOR SPRING READING

For Ages 3 and up

***I READ SIGNS*, by Tana Hoban** (Greenwillow Books, 1983) $4.95. Tana Hoban's many books for children use her photographs to teach concepts such as color or form, but most of all they encourage readers to look closely at the art within everyday surroundings. This book introduces signs and symbols seen along the highway.

For Ages 5 and up

***NO GOOD IN ART*, By Miriam Cohen, Illustrated by Lillian Hoban** (Greenwillow Books, 1980) $4.99. Jim thinks he's no good in art. In fact, he may be the only kindergartner with an empty page instead of a drawing.

For Ages 9 and up

***DRAWING FROM NATURE*, by Jim Anarsky, illustrated by the author.** (William Morrow, 1987) $8.95. Spring is a great time to develop artistic skills. Both nature and human activity offer so much that one never lacks subject matter. Often you need go only as far as the back yard to find it. Here's a nonfiction book to encourage the young artist. This unique approach to drawing asks the reader/artist to observe natural features—flowing water, seasonal and forest changes—before putting pencil to paper. Although this is not a typical how-to-draw book, it presents information on the technical aspects of drawing from nature clearly and concisely.

***THE ELEVENTH HOUR. A CURIOUS MYSTERY*, by Graeme Base** (Harry N. Abrams, 1988) $11.95. An elephant's 11th birthday party features 11 games preceding the banquet to be eaten at the eleventh hour. But when the time to eat arrives, the birthday feast has disappeared. The reader is invited to guess the thief. That's just the story; savor the visual tale as well.

For Ages 12 and up

Who says picture books without words are only for the very young? Here are three for students ranging from middle school to college. Such books are worth studying for the stories their artwork tells, but some teachers also ask students to read the pictures, then write the story they think belongs to them. ***WINDOWS*, by Jeannie Baker** (Greenwillow Books, 1991; $14.00), features amazing collage constructions, showing a changing environment as viewed from a boy's bedroom window. ***TIME FLIES*, by Eric Rohmann** (Crown Publishers, 1994; $15.00), is a tale of a bird flying around a dinosaur exhibit in a natural history museum. ***FULL MOON SOUP, or THE FALL OF THE HOTEL SPLENDIDE*, by Alastair Graham** (Penguin, 1996; $15.00) is a farcical romp about strange and ridiculous things that happen when the hotel chef samples the soup under the full moon.

SUMMER

SUMMERTIME, AND THE LEARNING IS EASY

It seems that every child now goes to some kind of camp in summer. Though I know there are many kids who do not, the number of campers grows each year.

Going to the backwoods to enjoy nature and learning to live in a primitive environment still appeals to some families; but the emphasis for today's summer camps has shifted to learning or improving skills. Sports camps, the main destination of most kids, have cropped up on practically every college campus in the country.

In my hometown literally thousands of youngsters report each summer to sports camps that cover every sport I can think of—from football to fencing. Kids enroll in these camps to learn how to become more competitive, and of course for the prestige of attending a sports camp at a university.

Academic camps open opportunities for other groups of kids to improve their computer, writing, speaking, leadership, foreign language, science, or math skills. Summer months can be a time for intense learning, no matter what the child's interest may be.

Camp in your library

I believe there are two guidelines that we can send the children with whom we correspond. Both of them reinforce the notion that summer is a time to continue learning, but perhaps not in school.

Guideline 1:

We can learn anywhere we decide to learn. We control our learning, not a school or a teacher. So we can decide to learn in our backyard or in the library just as well as in school or camp. For example, if one of our relatives has a failing kidney, we can go to the library and learn all about the functions of the kidneys and how people survive when a kidney fails. The library is one of the first places to go for summer learning through reading.

Guideline 2:

Use summer learning to develop people skills. Besides the particular focus of any camp (like tennis or computers), campers must learn to get along with a variety of other kids. Those close interactions test the adaptability, the patience, and the respect that each camper brings to this new environment. In the library, at a museum, or on the playground, similar opportunities occur. Each child experiences the give and take of a broad society; he or she must learn how to act responsibly and charitably while working with other summer learners.

LETTERS FOR WARM SUMMER DAYS

Send a postcard to your grandchild this summer. You don't have to travel far, a card picturing your hometown can be as interesting as a distant location. Here are some sample messages to inspire your own correspondence.

Ages 3-5

> Dear Regina,
>
> This postcard shows a castle we visited in England. Did you know that your first name means queen? When we visited this castle, I thought of you. Would you like to live in this castle?

Ages 6-8

> Dear Jaime,
>
> Greetings from Canada! We arrived Monday for our summer stay. We've been coming here for about 20 years. We've been busy unpacking and getting the boat in the water. Now I'm ready to do some fishing. Hope I catch lots of Northern Pike, like the one on this postcard. I'll send you another card to let you know whether I'm successful.

Ages 9-12

Dear LaShonda,

This may sound strange, but though I've lived in Louisville a long time, I've never been to the Kentucky Derby horse race. I've been to Churchill Downs race track, where the Derby is held, but never on Derby Day. It's too crowded for me to enjoy the race. I'm also not interested in betting. I sent you this postcard to show you what I do like about the Derby and Churchill Downs: the pretty horses.

Ages 13-16

Dear Rick,

I'm glad you liked the postcard from New Orleans. Knowing you play trumpet in your school band, I thought you'd get a kick out of seeing the picture of the Preservation Jazz Band Hall. It was a terrific performance.

I know you won't be able to send me a tape of your band concert, but if you think about it, pick up an extra copy of the program to send me. I'd like to read about what your band and the other performers played. Oh, and don't forget to keep practicing!

SUMMERTIME READING FUN

Reading just for fun can give kids a more positive attitude toward using reference and textbooks. Summer is a perfect time for kids to learn about the pleasures of recreational reading. Encourage your grandchild to make regular trips to the library in summer. Suggest some of these whimsical books and remind him/her that a librarian is always happy to help find them. These titles would also make great gifts for grandkids.

For Ages 3 and up

***HILARY AND THE LIONS*, by Deborah DeSaix** (Farrar Straus, 1990) $15.00. The stone lions in front of the library come alive, taking Hilary on a magical whirlwind tour of the city before returning her safely home. Kirkus Reviews says, "The richly luminous paintings are entrancing."

***HAIRY MACLARY FROM DONALDSON'S DAIRY*, by Lynley Dodd** (Gareth Stevens, 1988) $18.95. The reader follows the little black dog Hairy and his pals on their walk to the far end of town. Kids will enjoy repeating the phrase "Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy" as they read.

For Ages 5 and up

***JUST US WOMEN*, by Jeannette Caines. Illustrations by Pat Cummings** (Harper Collins, 1984) $4.95. A young girl and her favorite aunt share the excitement of planning a very special car trip to visit grandparents and relatives living in a small town in the South. The beautiful illustrations portray what some lucky children get to do; travel from their big city homes in the North to small towns in the South, where grandparents and other extended family still live.

***THE RELATIVES CAME*, by Cynthia Rylant, illustrated by Stephen Gammell** (Simon and Schuster, 1993) $5.99. Sometimes in the summer you visit family, and sometimes the family visits you, in the form of family reunions. In this story of a summer reunion, relatives "of all shapes and sizes" pile out of the station wagon and settle in throughout the house, laughing and hugging everyone.

***THE STUPIDS TAKE OFF*, By Harry Allard and James Marshall** (Houghton Mifflin, 1989) $14.95. The Stupid family vacation begins and ends with zany visits to the Stupids' various relatives. One young reader of this book said, "It's especially funny when the Stupids go to bed in their diving suits."

For Ages 6-8

***FRECKLE JUICE*, by Judy Blume** (Houghton Mifflin, 1995) $7.50. Andrew longs to have freckles like Nicky. Sharon convinces Andrew to buy her secret recipe for freckles; then the unexpected happens. Miss Kelly comes to the rescue and finds a magic freckle remover for Andrew.

***OLIVER BUTTON IS A SISSY*, by Tomie de Paola** (Harcourt Brace, 1990) $6.00. Although Oliver's classmates taunt him for not playing ball, he continues to do what he enjoys: he dances. At last his classmates discover and appreciate Oliver's talent.

For Ages 9 and up

***THE MISSING PIECE MEETS THE BIG O*, by Shel Silverstein** (Harper Collins, 1981) $13.99. The missing piece is waiting for someone to come along and take it somewhere. The big O comes along and helps the missing piece to see that it can roll along alone.

***A WRINKLE IN TIME*, by Madeleine L'Engle** (Houghton Mifflin, 1997) $13.99. This popular author's classic offers a mix of fantasy and science fiction. Four students venture into space and time when one student's father disappears while doing secret scientific work for the government.

***HANK THE COWDOG series, Volumes 1-23.* By John R. Erickson** (Maverick Books, 1994.) $6.95-$15.95, audiocassettes. Hank the Cowdog books are fun to read or listen to, especially on long trips in the car. The goofy humor keeps everybody entertained, as you learn of the exploits of a slightly pompous cowdog, Hank, and his faithful sidekick Drover as they supervise ranch security.

For Ages 12 and up

***NORBY AND THE INVADERS*, by Janet and Isaac Asimov** (Walker, 1985) $10.95. Jeff and Norby, his robot friend, rush off to the planet Jamya to aid Mentor First, Norby's ancestor. The two have a series of humorous escapades, including a side trip to a planet inhabited by blimp-like creatures called Hleno. This science-fiction tale will appeal to even reluctant readers.

***BRIDGE TO TERABITHIA*, by Katherine Paterson, illustrated by Donna Diamond** (Harper Trophy, 1987) $4.50. Jess Aarons' one ambition is to be the fastest runner at Lark Elementary School, but his life changes when a girl, Leslie Burke, challenges him. Leslie is an enigmatic newcomer whose family doesn't even own a TV. Together they create a secret kingdom called Terabithia, and a whole new world of imagination opens up to Jess, which sustains him after tragedy strikes his friend.

***THE SECRET GARDEN*, by Frances Hodgson Burnett** (Crown Publishers, 1911) $4.99. This tale of children misunderstood and suffering but conquering all has maintained a devoted following for almost a hundred years. Mary, the orphaned heroine, is sent to live at a huge estate. She discovers a secret garden, a master with a crooked back, his ailing son Colin, and Dickon, a maid's younger brother. Under Dickon's guidance, the children make the garden grow and bloom—without realizing that in the process they too grow and bloom.

***COME A STRANGER*, by Cynthia Voigt** (Atheneum, 1986.) $3.95. Though the main character is only 11, older readers may respond to her situation. As an African-American studying ballet in a primarily white culture, she begins to feel confidence in her talent and skills. But when someone then betrays her she must deal with another new situation.

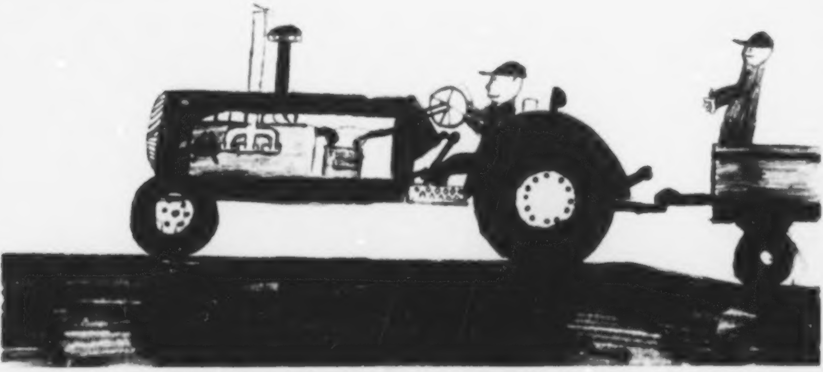
WHY DID THE UNDERWEAR CROSS THE ROAD? (Korman Scholastic, 1994) $13.95. Justin "the idea man" Zeckendorf is determined to win the 4th-grade Good Deed Contest. But he's stuck with two drippy girls, Jessica Zander and Margaret Zachary. Everyone calls them the three Z's, and Justin is sick of it. When he teams up with two of the smartest girls for the contest, his zany ideas almost cost them their chance to win.

For Ages 13-16

***MOTOWN AND DIDI: A LOVE STORY,* by Walter Dean Myers** (Bantam, 1987) $3.99. Didi and Motown fall in love while trying to save Didi's brother from drug addiction.

***ONE FAT SUMMER,* by Robert Lipsyte** (Harper Collins, 1991) $4.50. The story of an overweight boy's quest for self-respect.

***MRS. FRISBY AND THE RATS OF NIMH,* by Margaret Buffie** (Simon and Schuster, 1986) $4.50. In this science fiction tale, rats become superintelligent through a series of laboratory injections.



by Kirk Lowry, 4th grade

What's Happening at School?

LEARNING

SCHOOL AND LEARNING

by Naomi Ritter

Since school time occupies such a significant part of any child's life, your grandchild's school experiences offer a natural topic for letters. Grandparents can expand on positive aspects of education in their own lives and those of people the child admires. For instance, the crucial factor enabling Frederick Douglass to become an effective activist for African-Americans was his learning to read at an early age. A letter about the huge opportunity that learning can give anyone may help to motivate your grandchild's school work.

You can also boost a child's interest in subjects that you enjoy too. Take Geography, for instance, which we all need to know. Even if you're not thrilled by the academic study of maps, you have probably visited some places—near or far—that a child might like reading about in your letters. Places in the news also offer ready topics. Kids are usually interested in the

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locations of the Olympics, or any news story about children their own age. *Writing* about the news also encourages the *reading* about the news.

The Discipline of School Makes Us Successful Adults

If your grandchild writes about his/her school experiences, there will probably be some complaints about having to do unwelcome things. For instance, in the first grade many children have trouble just sitting still for hours on end. For older kids this constraint translates into the need to concentrate on subjects of little or no interest. Homework and tests form a steady demand that students are required to meet, and many rebel against it.

How can you soften such burdens? Your letters can explore strategies for helping a child accept them. First of all, you can identify personally with your grandchild's complaints, recalling your own school problems. Then you can introduce the long view: say how all that unpleasantness appeared to you later as just "coming with the territory" of growing up.

If children see that discipline is their best friend in becoming successful, happy people, they are already on the way to success. Motivation flows from the conviction that doing the hard work pays off. For many people, work brings its own reward. You can write about the many satisfactions of doing a job well; of taking pride in your work; of knowing that you contribute to a worthy project. You might cite examples from your own work that have given you particular pleasure.

Maximizing the Fun of School

Of course you'll want to write about the good times kids can have at school too. For example, some education theorists believe the socializing process is just as valuable as the other kinds of learning at school.

Your letters might ask about friends your grandchild has made at school and what they do together. Another topic is teamwork: school activity often includes team projects, so you might ask the role your grandchild is playing. Any such extension of "book-learning," such as the arts, field trips, interviewing, or research in the community, creates interesting opportunities for your correspondence.

Encouraging Curiosity

Larry King, the popular radio and TV talk show host, has attributed his success to his native curiosity. As a child he would seize every opportunity to learn from others by asking questions. Even on the school bus! He would ask the driver, "So what's it like driving the bus? What parts do you enjoy most? What don't you like about it?"

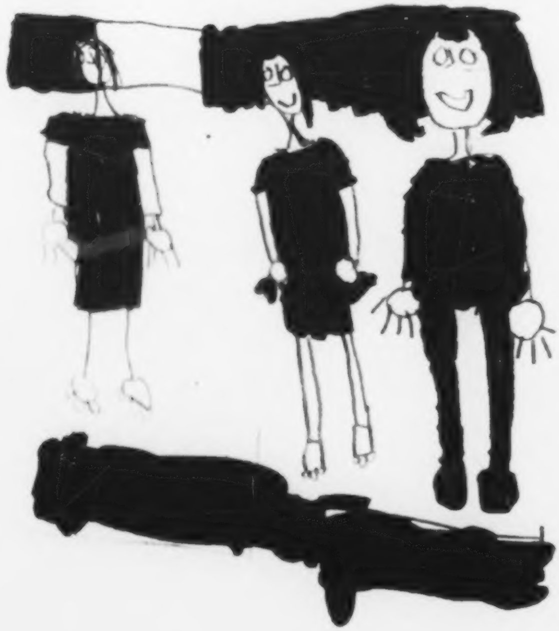
We can see that King has developed this basic trait into a brilliant career. Obviously, asking the right questions and listening carefully to the answers is what distinguishes him as a host. But do the rest of us need to be so curious? Isn't it impolite to ask a lot of questions?

Especially for children, curiosity is the key to success in school. Students must feel interested enough in what they learn to ask for more information; only by doing so can they expand their knowledge to suit their own needs. The questioning process also personalizes one's learning, making it memorable. How many times have you had to look up a fact of negligible interest to you—like your bank statement's closing date? But you prob-

ably remember the date December 7, 1941 because the attack on Pearl Harbor had personal meaning for you.

Furthermore, pursuing and satisfying curiosity makes you an interesting person. An inquiring mind is an invaluable resource for touching the life around it. If you find your world worth questioning, others will find you worth talking to.

Young people especially appreciate seniors who take a lively interest in their lives. The old fogeys whose standard reaction is, "Oh, these kids today! What is the world coming to?" don't encourage interaction. You don't have to like what the youth culture adopts —rock music, for instance—but kids will be impressed by the interest expressed by your questions about it. Whoever asks questions will go far, both in school and in life.



by Morgan Eads, 1st Grade

LETTERS ABOUT SCHOOL

Ages 3-5

Dear Samantha,

I hear you are going to start going to school in the mornings. It will be fun to learn some new songs and make some new friends.

After your first week, please write to tell me about what you like best about your new school.

Ages 6-8

Dear Abe,

Starting a new school year is exciting, isn't it? When I was a boy, I always wondered what new things I would learn. What do you think you will learn this year in math?

Keep working hard. You will be happy if you do. Please write to tell me about school.

Ages 9-12

Dear Rachel,

You will learn many new ideas this year, I am sure. You will also make new friends if you want to do so. That's the wonderful thing about starting a new school year.

A new school year is a great time to ask ourselves how we will make this a super year. What do you think you want to accomplish this year? Do you have a subject in which you want to raise your grade? Are there projects that you want to work on?

Please tell me about the things you want to do. If there is any way I can help you, just say the word!

Ages 13-16

Dear Bobby,

What are you up to in school now? It's so long since I was in the tenth grade; I bet I could learn plenty about what you are studying too. Also, do you still do those marvelous cartoons? I loved the ones you sent me from the school newspaper; please keep sending them!

I wonder if cartooning can be a successful career. Of course the really successful cartoon artists, like Jim Garfield and Gary Trudeau, must have labored long before getting recognized. Are you interested enough in this kind of work to persist at it?

Love to everyone, but especially to you!

BOOKS AND VIDEOS ABOUT LEARNING

For Ages 3-5

KNOWING NUMBERS, UNDERSTANDING OPPOSITES (Playskool Books, 1997) $5.99. These tabbed board books explain essential concepts with colorful indexed tabs. Bright, lively pictures of children and favorite objects make the books appealing for toddlers to use by themselves.

CARL GOES TO DAYCARE, by Alexandra Day (Farrar Straus, 1993) $5.95. *BOOKLIST* said, "In this almost wordless fantasy, Carl takes charge of his daycare center when the teacher accidentally gets locked outside. Sure to be one of the favorites in a deservedly popular series."

For Ages 6-8

THE MAGIC SCHOOL BUS BOXED SET (Scholastic Video) $38.99. The Magic School Bus is on the move, with three videos loaded with fun and information. In *THE BUSASAURUS* kids learn all about prehistoric animals; *TAKING FLIGHT* deals with airplanes; *THE MAGIC SCHOOL BUS FLEXES ITS MUSCLES* tells about the human body and how it works.

IF YOU'RE NOT HERE, PLEASE RAISE YOUR HAND: POEMS ABOUT SCHOOL, by Kalli Dakos. (Simon and Schuster, 1995) $3.95. This collection celebrates the joy and heartbreak of elementary school. Students and teachers tell their stories that kids have called "very funny." Named among KIDS' FAVORITE BOOKS by the Children's Book Council.

For Ages 9 and up

***NOTHING'S FAIR IN FIFTH GRADE*, by Barthe DeClements** (Scholastic, 1998) $2.95. Winner of ten State Children's Books Awards and the California Young Reader Medal, this book is about a group of fifth graders that must deal with an overweight classmate who steals everyone's lunch money to buy candy for herself. *BOOK LIST* said, "A humorous tale that rocks with fifth-grade truth."

***SPACEMAN*, by Jane Cutler** (Dutton, 1997) $14.99. When Gary habitually "spaces out" in class, his parents send him to a special school for kids with learning difficulties. There he learns that being different also means being uniquely valuable.

For Ages 12 and up

MY UNDERRATED YEAR, by Randy Powell. (Farrar Straus, 1991) $3.95. Roger's dreams for sophomore year seem threatened when he feels attracted to Mary Jo, his only rival for the top place on the tennis team. The *SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL* said, "Roger's candid narration humorously and poignantly exposes the fragile ego of the teenage athlete... Readers will empathize with the emotional roller coaster of high-school sports and friendships."

***PROMISE ME THE MOON*, by Joyce Barnes** (Dial Books, 1997) $14.99. Annie's eighth-grade year is full of pressures: her boyfriend and best girlfriend are drifting away, and she's in the Enriched Science class. Should she apply to one of the best high schools in Ohio, which would help her pursue her goal of becoming an astronaut? Readers will recognize their own dilemma in Annie's nagging question, "Who am I?"

***THE TAKING OF ROOM 114. A HOSTAGE DRAMA IN POEMS*, by Mel Glenn** (Lodestar Books, 1997) $16.99. This powerful book about some seniors taken hostage by their teacher reveals the dreams, fears, and secrets of kids in an urban high school. Perfect for all teenagers who think they hate poetry.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

IT'S FIELD TRIP TIME

Have you been to the airport when a group of children parade down the concourse led by an airport guide? Or at a government monument, such as the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC, when dozens of school buses discharge children? Or at the local fire station when a group of school children come to see what a local firehouse looks like? The children and their teachers are there on a field trip.

Spring is the prime time for teachers to take students on field trips, excursions that broaden their experience. As pen pals to grandchildren, we can remind them we are interested in what they are learning on these trips. In your letters, be sure to ask specific questions about what they found interesting and what they learned from their new experience.

Though the phrase "field trip" is a school-based term, we can learn any time we visit a new place. If I walk to a neighborhood museum displaying cowboy art, I learn something new. If I visit a park with a wide variety of trees that are marked with their names, I learn something new. If I go to a river gorge, I learn about the layers of rock that the river has laid bare.

We can remind our writing partners that these excursions may reveal ideas worth pondering. Share them. When you take a small trip and find something interesting, don't just send your pen pal a postcard that says, "Wish you were here." Instead, give at least one fact that captured your imagination. Share your adventures with children and encourage them to share theirs with you. Your excitement about what you learn can be infectious. Since learning never ends, young and old can learn together, taking pleasure in sharing knowledge.

LETTERS ON TAKING AN EXCURSION

Ages 3-5

Dear Christopher,

Your mom wrote that you visited the fire station with your class. Fire trucks always used to be red, but now sometimes they are yellow or green. What color were the fire trucks you saw? Please send me a drawing!

Ages 6-8

Dear Sherry,

Thanks for your letter describing your trip to the Natural History museum. Those dinosaur skeletons sound impressive... and a little scary. How did you learn how to spell the names, like apatosaurus and tyrannosaurus?

Ages 9-12

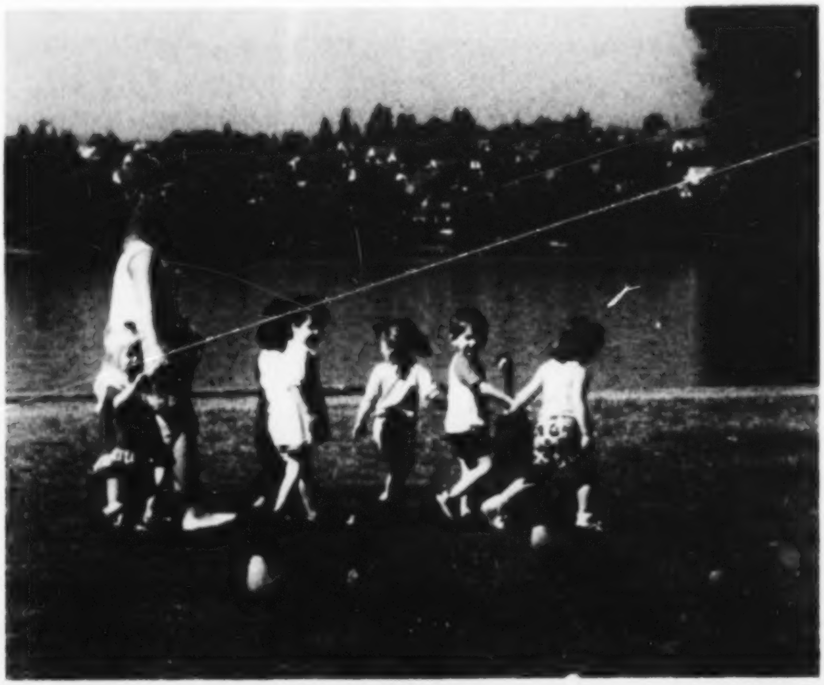
Dear Haley,

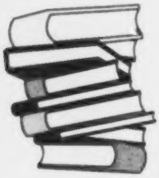
As I write this letter, I'm looking out the window into my backyard. We have had so much rain that it looks like a little pond out there. And to think, where you live it's been so dry, you've had problems with fires. Wish there were some way we could send some of this rain to your area. That would help everyone, wouldn't it?

Ages 13-16

Dear Efren,

I'm enclosing some brochures about the Smoky Mountain National Park, which should give you some good information for your report. I'm glad you mentioned you were researching that topic. I enjoy helping you. It also gives me an opportunity to recall times I visited the Smokies. Please let me know how your report turns out.





BOOKS ABOUT TRAVELING

For Ages 3 and up

***THE UMBRELLA DAY*, by Nancy Evans Cooney** (Philomel, 1989) $14.95. Missy thinks she doesn't need an umbrella, but finds it can do more than just protect her from the rain. This book prompts children to create imaginative adventures when under an umbrella.

***THE DAY JIMMY'S BOA ATE THE WASH*, by Trinka Hakes Noble. Illustrated by Steven Kellogg** (Penguin Books, 1980) $4.99. It starts off as an ordinary class trip to the farm: boring. But before long, chaos takes over as one zany incident leads to another. Soon the entire farm is in an uproar.

For Ages 5 and up

***SONG LEE AND THE LEECH MAN*, by Suzy Kline** (Viking, 1995) $11.99. Harry plots revenge against Sidney, the class tattletale, when Miss Mackle's second graders go on a field trip to the pond.

***THE MAGIC SCHOOL BUS*, by Joanna Cole. Illustrated by Bruce Degen** (Scholastic, Inc., 1987-1994) $14.95-$19.95. Just name where you'd like to visit: The Waterworks, The Solar System, On the Ocean Floor, Inside the Human Body, In the Time of the Dinosaurs. Then the strangest teacher ever, Ms. Frizzle, will lead her class on a field trip there.

For Ages 9 and up

***2095: THE TIME WARP TRIO series*, by Jon Scieszka** (Viking/Penguin, 1995) $11.99. On a field trip to New York's Museum of Natural History, Joe, Sam and Fred travel 100 years into the future, where they encounter robots, antigravity disks, and their own grandchildren.

***TINTIN'S TRAVEL DIARIES*, by Daniel De Bruycker and Maxmilien Dauber** (Barron's, 1995) $6.95. This series enables readers to explore ten different countries with Tintin and his cartoon pals. Each volume looks at a country's customs, culture and geography, using cartoon art and color photos. In the most recent editions, Tintin tours Scotland and Tibet.

For Ages 12 and up

***THE CHILLING HOUR. TALES OF THE REAL AND UNREAL*, by Collin McDonald** (Cobblehill Books, 1992) $14.00. A collection of horror stories, in which strange occurrences happen in otherwise normal settings—such as a school field trip.

***CRAZY WEEKEND*, by Gary Soto** (Scholastic, Inc., 1994) $3.50. Spending the weekend in his uncle's messy apartment in Fresno is not Hector's idea of getting away from it all. But after flying a rickety plane, spotting an armored car heist, and warding off bumbling thieves, it becomes his craziest weekend ever.

by David Halla, 6th grade

Quick Ideas for Quick Letters

IDEAS FROM AND ABOUT WRITING GRANDPARENTS

Here's an account of my own enthusiastic correspondence with my granddaughter. See if you can adapt what I've done to your particular relationship with your grandchild.

"Here's Mud in Your Eye—A Pig Tale"

My three-year-old granddaughter Aiko lives in Honolulu. Though she can't read yet, I send her notes several times each month. I want her to know me through my letters as much as through our quick hellos over the telephone.

When I write to Aiko, I try to send her something that will attract the attention of a three year old—a photograph, a picture from a magazine, an audio cassette, or a short book. I want her to see or hear something from me besides the words that her mother or father will read from my notes.

One of my notes was written on the back of a photo. I had taken a picture of a group of pigs. One of the pigs was looking directly into the camera. I drew a speech balloon from the pig's mouth, so he seemed to say, "Hi, Aiko!"

On the back of the photo I printed this message:

Dear Aiko,

Why don't you take this picture to school? Ask your friends what they know about pigs. Let me know what you learn.

I love you.

Grandpa

The next week when I called my Honolulu family, I learned that Aiko took the picture to her daycare school. It was a hit with her friends because the caregiver put the picture on the bulletin board, and they had a conversation about pigs. They found books with pigs in them, and they laughed at the "funny Grandpa who took pictures of pigs."

When I write to grandchildren, I use material from my daily life as much as possible. Snapshots—whether recent or old—make eye-catching connections between me and my grandchildren. For example: "Here is grandma when she was your mother's age." I also use the front of old greeting cards as a way of communicating with a very young grandchild. Recently, I found a postcard showing the beautiful flower called the Bird of Paradise. I sent the card with a this brief message:

Dear Aiko,

This flower is called the Bird of Paradise. Can you see why it is called a bird?

Love, Grandpa

As these children grow older, my messages will become more complex, but the basic concerns will stay the same: I care about you and want you to learn all you can. My messages may emphasize education or character development, depending on the responses that I get. I can try to be funny or serious in writing. In other words, I can be myself. It's great fun, and I feel good when I write to my grandkids.

Here are some suggestions on writing from members of our Senior Partners Network.

1) Make your letters strongly encouraging.

2) Enclose snapshots that illustrate you, your home, pets, and interesting places and activities. Pictures enhance the educational value of your letter and add excitement.

3) Send educational brochures about your area, free from your Chamber of Commerce.

4) You can write an inspiring letter in 15 minutes: a small investment of time with great benefits. Your blessings will probably exceed your grandchild's. Jesus said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20.35).

5) Be patient. If your grandchild doesn't reply, write again.

6) Make every letter express your love, encouragement, and enthusiasm.

7) Try to be interesting at the child's level. Include a chuckle in each letter. Be natural, informal, fun.

8) Letters make a vital learning process for the child writing you. He or she develops skills in writing, reading, communication, and self-expression. It's positive and active, as opposed to the negative influences of overdosing on TV!

We're sure that your letters will bring your grandchild just the loving warmth needed to build a unique relationship.

—*Truman and Julie Smothers*

TOPIC IDEAS

Months, weeks and days that celebrate events and people of national significance offer letter topics of immediate interest. Did you know that National Grandparents' Day is in early September? In a letter to your grandchild at that time you might write about what a special relationship you have together.

For timely ideas on officially designated events and months, *CHASE'S CALENDAR OF ANNUAL EVENTS* (Appletree Press) is the perfect resource. If you can't find it in a bookstore, your public library probably has *CHASE'S*.

Here's just a sample of the information:

Labor History Month: May

Women's History Month: March

Education and Sharing Day: April 11

Older Americans' Month: May

Human Rights Week: December 10-17

Bill of Rights Day: December 15

Hispanic Heritage Month: September

United Nations Day: October 24

Native Americans' Month: November

Jewish Heritage Week: April 21-28

National Volunteer Week: April 21-27

Other features are: Spotlight on People (birth and death anniversaries), Religion, Education, The Past, Facts about States, National Education Goals—even the Naming of Hurricanes!

WRITING LETTERS TO OTHER CHILDREN

A central part of a child's life is friendship. The ***Senior Partners Network*** helps seniors be just the encouraging friend a child may need, by giving the gift of letter-writing. Seniors in the Network do for other kids what you do for your grandkids. A Senior Partner ensures that a Junior Partner has a special older pen pal—one who can share discoveries, offer advice on problems, and generally enjoy friendship through the mail. Such a partner can make the difference between failure and success in young lives.

Senior Partners also derive benefits from this relationship. In 1990 a study by the Center on Rural Elderly concluded that seniors and youths benefit significantly by programs that sponsor activities between the two groups.

Some benefits for seniors are:

- higher self-esteem
- new friends and social contacts
- restored confidence
- shared skills and talents
- a chance to exchange affection

Some benefits for the youth are:

- a broader view of life and aging
- a sense of responsibility
- an acceptance of differences
- meaningful relationships with someone special
- interaction with positive adult role models

*(**Source**: Intergenerational Relations, Center on Rural Elderly, May 1990.)*

Service clubs and groups of retired persons can help young people through the Senior Partners Network. In just a few minutes a month, you could build a lasting friendship and increase a child's enthusiasm for learning. If you would like to have a pen pal, just call or write, and we will happily give you as many Junior Partners as you have time and energy to correspond with. Just call the Family Literacy Center at (800) 759-4723 to sign up for the **Senior Partners Network**.

Truman and Julie Smothers are enthusiastic Senior Partners, who sent the following letter to the editor of *THE WRITE PARTNER* newsletter. The Smotherses live in the desert, near Deming, New Mexico.

> Dear Editor,
>
> We heartily congratulate you for your great project that brings together public school students and seniors as letter-writing partners! We're so impressed we've both requested three young pen pals. Over the years we've had great joy writing to pen pals.
>
> Many people—both young and old—say they will write letters, but fail to keep their commitment. You're probably encountering this snag. Our counsel is "Never be discouraged. Just be encouraged by those who do write, by those who share your vision of the benefits of this project."
>
> Julie and I are assigned to students Kisha Smith and Jacob Tussey in the same school in Salem—which is close to Julie's home town of Louisville, where we met 14 years ago. We are hoping to receive our first letter from them any day. Meanwhile, on the phone, I requested that you assign us to another student each. If all reply, that would give us two students each.
>
> If you have plenty of students on your list, may we request one more pen pal each? That would give us three each if all reply. This could help you fill the gap, as I fear some seniors would rather go fishing than write letters!
>
> God Bless You!
>
> —*Truman and Julie*

THE READING AND WRITING CHALLENGE

The U.S. Department of Education sponsors a program called READ*WRITE*NOW! Free kits include a 48-page booklet, "Activities for Reading and Writing Fun," plus how-to materials, a vocabulary log, certificates and more.

What, you ask, is READ*WRITE*NOW?

It's a challenge to improve the reading and writing of children in preschool through sixth grade.

How can a person participate?

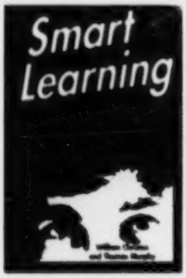
Check with your local library. Kits are available at 16,000 libraries and at many READING IS FUNDAMENTAL (RIF) sites. Check the Web site- http://www.ed.gov/Family/ Or call 1-800-USA-LEARN.

OTHER RESOURCES

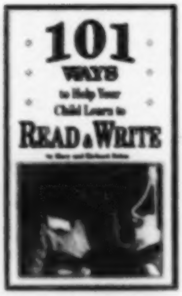
BOOKS FOR PARENTS

***THE CURIOUS LEARNER. HELP YOUR CHILD DEVELOP ACADEMIC AND CREATIVE SKILLS*, by Marjorie R. Simic, Melinda McClain, and Michael Shermis.** Gives practical advice on developing children's natural curiosity about math, science, and history, and shows how to spark children's appreciation of poetry, music, art, and writing. Includes expert advice, books and activities to share, plus answers to parents' questions. Softcover 6 x 9, 156 pgs., Order# BB-100-1013.

***THE CONFIDENT LEARNER: HELP YOUR CHILD SUCCEED IN SCHOOL*. by Marjorie R. Simic, Melinda McClain, and Michael Shermis** A confident learner is a child with a positive attitude, who goes to school eager to learn. Learn to help children develop high self-esteem, strong motivation, self-discipline, good health and fitness, and the ability to deal with stress. Includes practical advice, answers to parents' questions, fun family activities, and lists of books to read and share. Softcover 6 x 9, 131 pgs., $9.95. Order#: BB-100-1023.



***SMART LEARNING: A STUDY SKILLS GUIDE FOR TEENS*, by William Christen and Thomas Murphy.** Helps students learn to learn, offering the tools for academic success. Includes techniques for taking notes, test-taking strategies, guidelines for writing projects, time-management skills, plus valuable ways to make decisions and set goals. Written for the teenager and highlighted by humorous illustrations and useful diagrams. Softcover 6 x 9, 111 pgs. Order#: BB-100-1020.



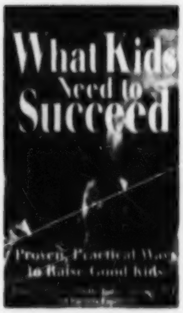
***101 WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN TO READ AND WRITE,* by Mary and Richard Behm**. Grades PreK-5. Practical and enjoyable ways parents can help develop their kids' reading and writing skills: at bedtime, while watching TV, in the car, in the grocery store, or in the kitchen. Ideas incorporate literacy learning into everyday activities. Softcover 4 x 6, 64 pgs. Order#: BB-I02-1500.

***TEACH A CHILD TO READ WITH CHILDREN'S BOOKS,* by Mark B. Thogmartin.** Combining story reading, phonics, and writing to promote reading success, this book is for anyone who works with children and offers an integrated approach to learning to read. Softcover, 7 x 9, Grades PreK-2. Order#: BB-109-1633

***HELP YOUR CHILD READ AND SUCCEED,* by Carl B. Smith.** Parents play an important role in promoting their children's reading achievement. This interesting, accessible book offers parents the information and confidence they need to help their children succeed with reading. Includes parent/child activities, recommended book lists by grade-level and interest, read-aloud techniques, and stories to share. Softcover 6 x 9, 265 pgs. Order#: BB-100-1019.

¡LEAMOS!
LET'S READ!

***¡LEAMOS!/LET'S READ! WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN TO READ AND SUCCEED.* by Mary and Richard Behm**. This is the Spanish language version of *101 WAYS*, with each page of text in Spanish on one side and English on the other. Softcover, 6 x 9 , 108 pgs. Order#: BB-100-1263.


What Kids Need to Succeed
Proven, Practical Ways to Raise Good Kids

WHAT KIDS NEED TO SUCCEED. PROVEN PRACTICAL WAYS TO RAISE GOOD KIDS, **by Peter L. Benson, Judy Galbraith, and Pamela Espeland**. This book offers parents and community leaders pragmatic ways to raise caring, contributing, healthy, happy kids. Based on a study of 270,000 young people in 600 communities across the nation, this book identifies thirty "developmental assets" that help young people thrive. Includes special tips for teens. Grades 6-12. Softcover 4 x 6. Order#: BB-103-1520.

MY GALAXY OF MEMORIES, FEELINGS, AND DREAMS, **By George and Marilee Tomek.** This writing journal for kids and their families encourages recording a year's worth of thoughts, activities, and ideas. Family members participate by filling in stories about their lives and sharing their thoughts. Softcover 8 1/2 x 11. Grades 1-8. Order#: BB-111-1634.

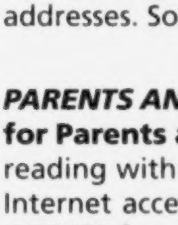
BOOKS TO SHARE

PARENTS AND CHILDREN TOGETHER: DIFFERENT PEOPLES OF THE WORLD, developed by The Family Literacy Center. One of 30 titles offered in the Parents and Children Together series, this book and audiotape offer a dynamic way to help parents support their children's development and school performance. Both book and tape have activities for families to share, books for future reading, and three read-along stories. Softcover 5 x 7 book and audiotape. Grades PreK-5. Order#: BB-900-1147

Online
Classroom

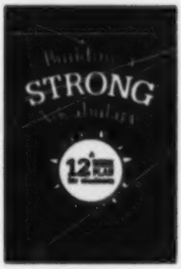
***THE ONLINE CLASSROOM: TEACHING WITH THE INTERNET,* by Eileen G. Cotton.** Written by a teacher for other teachers, this book is also useful for parents to guide kids in using the Internet. It can save hours of wandering in virtual space with its vast array of sample lessons at varying levels of sophistication. All you need to get started is a computer and a connection to the Internet. This guide gives you the rest, including hundreds of Internet addresses. Softcover 8 x 11. Order#: BB-400-1346.

***PARENTS AND CHILDREN TOGETHER ONLINE.* A Magazine for Parents and Children on the Internet.** Share the joy of reading with a child with this online publication. If you have Internet access you can obtain *PARENTS AND CHILDREN TOGETHER* free through the ERIC clearinghouse on Reading, English and Communication Website. You'll find original stories and articles for parents and children to share, plus articles on parenting and book reviews of the latest children's literature. Kids can join the storytelling in the "Global Campfire" writing forum. You'll find *PARENTS AND CHILDREN TOGETHER* ONLINE by following the links at: http://www.kidscanlearn.com.



***HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD WITH HOMEWORK. EVERY CARING PARENT'S GUIDE TO ENCOURAGING GOOD STUDY HABITS AND ENDING THE HOMEWORK WARS,* by Marguerite C. Radencich and Jeanne Shay Schumm.** Offers techniques for parents to help their children succeed in school, making homework more bearable for everyone involved. Parents learn how to initiate homework schedules, establish a home study center, and communicate effectively with teachers. Explains how to assist with subjects from math to foreign languages, and develop skills for writing reports and taking tests. Grades 1-8, 7 x 9, 208 pgs. Order#: BB-103-1518.

BUILDING VOCABULARY



***BUILDING A STRONG VOCABULARY. A TWELVE WEEK PLAN,* by Carl B. Smith.** This practical guide offers parents powerful strategies to help school-age children develop strong vocabularies. Working together, parents and children explore the world of context clues, analogies, synonyms and antonyms, word maps, Greek and Latin roots, word families, words from other languages, and much more. Grades K-12; 6 x 9, 86 pgs. Order# BB-100-1015.

***WORD HISTORY: A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE,* by Carl B. Smith and Eugene Reade.** Enriches students' understanding of what our language once was, has come to be, and is ever becoming. Discussions of the language's history and stimulating exercises allow students to enjoy the oddities of English. Curious spellings, the historic conventions of grammar, and the arbitrary order of syntax appear as fascinating, storied happenings. English language and literature make up a many-layered cake, whose native layers—Anglo-Saxon and Norman French—cohere with the many-flavored icings of Latin, Greek, and other borrowed tongues. Softcover 6 x 9, 96 pgs. Order#: BB-104-1241

***WORD HISTORY: A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR THE TEACHER,* by Carl B. Smith and Eugene Reade.** This set puts the curiosity, quirkiness, fun and aggravation of the history of English at your fingertips, so families or students can see the roots of English. Students will be writing Anglo-Saxon and Middle-English phrases, grasping the complexity of spelling in terms of loan-words, and savoring the rich flavors of our language. One can become truly literate with an understanding of language from the inside out. Families can also use this Guide for handy home reference. Softcover 6 x 9. Order#: BB-104-1268

VIDEOS

***MAKE A DIFFERENCE—TALK ABOUT BOOKS,* developed by Carl B. Smith.** The most powerful thing parents can do to promote their children's reading and learning is to read aloud and talk about books. This video demonstrates enjoyable ways parents can share books to connect with their children, promote mutual respect, improve school performance, and instill a love of reading. The video includes specific ideas parents can use at home. Includes a 16-page discussion guide with reproducible pages. Video, 16 minutes. Grades Pre-K -8. Order#: BB-309-628
Also available in Spanish. Ask for: ***SEA USTED BUENA INFLUENCIA SOBRE SUS HIJOS: HABLE ACERCA DE LOS LIBROS.*** Order#: BB-319-1698

***PARENTS AS TUTORS. HELPING WITH HOMEWORK.* Developed by Carl B. Smith.** This video and accompanying 16-page discussion guide shows parents how to help their children with common homework problems. Its effectiveness lies in encouraging children to build on their learning and study skills. Parents learn strategies to guide their children through reading assignments and comprehension, vocabulary and word recognition, writing assignments, and preparation for tests and oral reports. The video has four short parts, to allow for discussion with other parents. Video, 26 minutes. Grades K-6; 26 minutes. Order#: BB-304-1506.
Also available in Spanish. Ask for: ***LOS PADRES COMO TUTORES: COMO AYUDAR CON LA TAREA.*** Order#: BB-319-1699.

***PARENTS SHARING BOOKS,* developed by the Family Literacy Center.** In this video, parents, children, and teachers share success stories from book-sharing programs at their schools. Parents can see the benefits of book sharing and strategies to encourage reading and communication. Video, 16 minutes, Grades K-12. Order #: BB-300-1079

BOOKS WITH AUDIOCASSETTES

The Family Literacy Center publishes a series of booklets with audiocassettes for parents and children ages 4–10. Each booklet with cassettes contains guidance, activities, suggested books, and two or three delightfully illustrated read-along stories that children can enjoy alone or with an adult.

Topics include:

Beginning a New School Year (BB-900-1120)
Computers and Your Child (BB-900-1129)
Different Peoples of the World (BB-900-1147)
Encouraging Good Homework Habits (BB-900-1123)
Enjoying Art All Around Us (BB-104-1268)
Folktales for Family Fun (BB-900-1105)
Learning about the Lives of Famous People (BB-900-1171)
Learning Science at Home (BB-900-1099)
Learning and Self-Esteem (BB-900-1093)
Making History Come Alive (BB-900-1150)
Making Writing Meaningful (BB-900-1156)
Motivating Your Child to Learn (BB-900-1090)
Parents as Models (BB-900-1114)
Speaking and Listening (BB-900-1159)
Stretching Young Minds in the Summertime (BB-900-1111)
Teamwork Learning (BB-900-1165)
Using the Library (BB-900-1141)

Softcover 5 x 7 books and audio tape.

To order all materials described above: Call 800-925-7853, Fax 812-331-2776, or write ERIC/EDINFO, PO Box 5953, Bloomington, IN 47407.

“Keep those cards and letters going!!”

Build a loving, lasting friendship with your grandkids.

You *can* influence the lives of your grandchildren

- Help them succeed in school
- Promote kindness and good citizenship
- Create a strong bond between you
- Put a smile on their faces every month

You'll be a hero simply by sending a monthly note.

All you need to know is laid out in clear steps in *With Love, Grandma.*

- Sample letters
- Dozens of themes
- Books to share
- Cards
- Humor

Based on years of experience at the *Senior Partners Network*, this book will help you find the right topics and give you sample letters, cards, and e-mail messages. All you have to do is add your own personality!

About the Author

Dr. Carl B. Smith is director of the Family Learning Association and creator of the ***Senior Partners Network***, a group dedicated to providing at risk kids with a cross-generational relationship through regular letter-writing.

The author of over forty books, Smith has spent a lifetime in education in the language arts, and is the proudest grandfather of six.